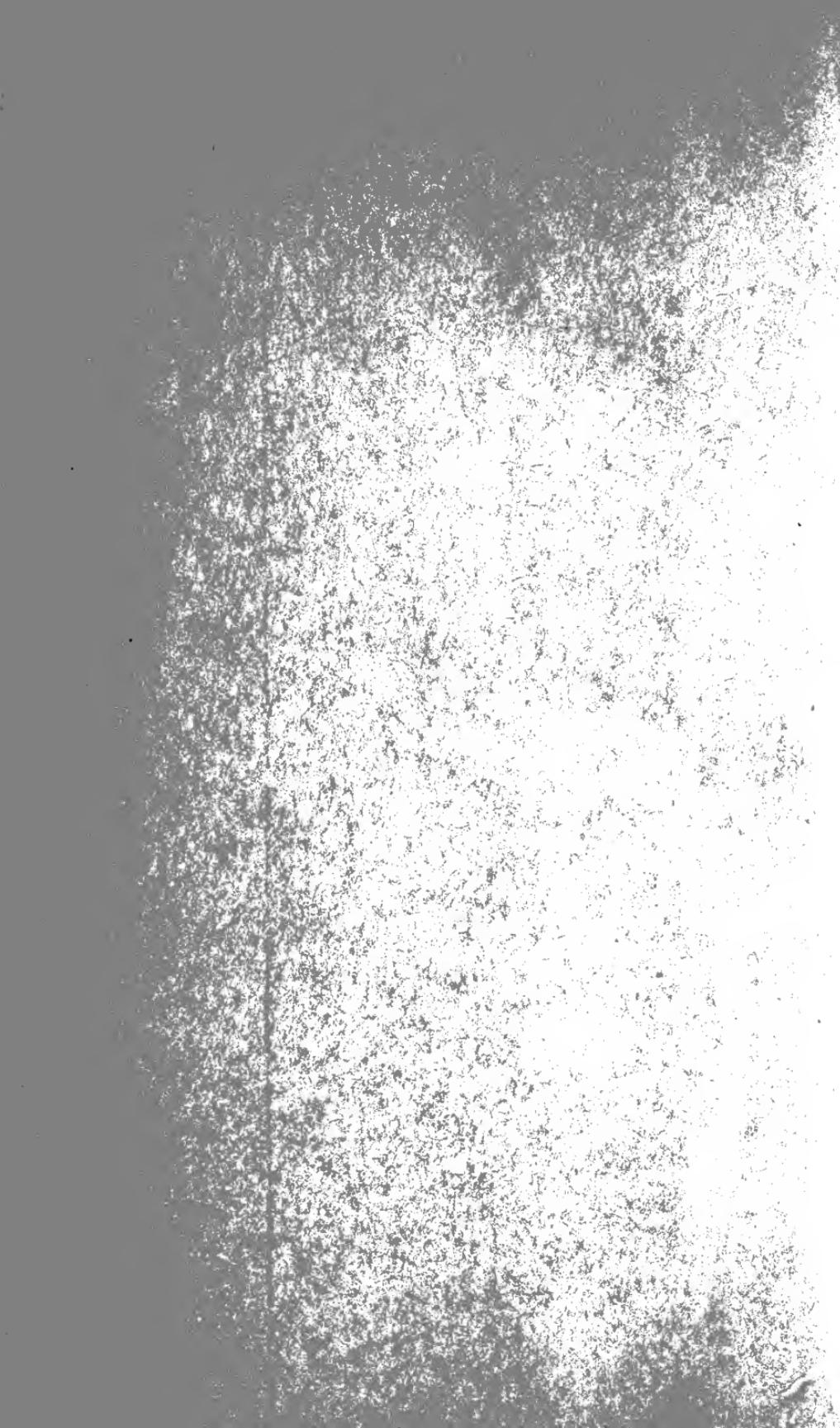


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JOAQUIN

THE CLAUDE DUVAL OF CALIFORNIA



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MARAUDER OF THE MINES.

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JOAQUIN,

(THE CLAUDE DUVAL OF CALIFORNIA);

OR,

THE MARAUDER OF THE MINES.

A Romance founded on Truth.



NEW YORK:

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SYNOPSIS.

MANY are still living of those who can yet recall the feats of the man whose name gives title to this book. Joaquin Murietta was the son of worthy parents, and nothing in his early youth betokened any traits of the monster which he afterwards became. He left Sonora, the lovely country of his birth, and visited the province of Mexico, where he became attached to the household of the then famous Santa Anna. Quarrelling with one of the attaches, he openly insulted him; but the man he insulted did not resent it, and Joaquin scornfully rode away, to soon after re-appear in his native town. Here he married a young Sonorian, Carmela Felix. A year of tranquil happiness had barely passed before he was summoned by his brother to visit him at the Mission of San Jose, in California. He went, accompanied by his wife. Carlos, the brother, was rejoiced to have Joaquin with him. Together they proceeded upon some business to the mines. Here a friend of theirs, Flores, was found in possession of a mule alleged to have been stolen. Carlos was with Flores at the time of his arrest; and the first thing that Joaquin knew of the arrest of his brother was seeing the two friends hanging from a tree—dead! From that moment Joaquin's nature and disposition underwent a fearful change. Still, however, at the entreaties of his wife, Joaquin resumed work as a miner. On one occasion a set of ruffians tried to drive him from the claim on which he was at work. Joaquin resisted. Pistols flashed, Joaquin fell, wounded and senseless. When he awoke to reason, it was to find Carmela, worse than dead, beside him. From this moment the fires of perdition appeared to blaze in his heart. From crime to crime he passed on with furious rage, until there was hardly a town in California that couldn't show the victims of his fatal bullet or the smouldering ruins caused by his torch. In the following pages every trace of his blood-stained footsteps is closely followed. Some of the facts are furnished by cotemporary witnesses; most of them by official documents. He proceeded from step to step, wading deeper and deeper into crime, until quiet citizens were almost afraid to breathe his name aloud. Nor was he alone in his nefarious exploits. His infamous notoriety surrounded him with a band of satellites only inferior to himself in his bad eminence. Resolute men went—sometimes in parties, sometimes singly—to waylay and capture him. Very few, however, returned to say anything of his whereabouts. In some solitary gulley the daring men would be found, with some token or other left to signify that they had met their death at the hands of Joaquin or some of his heartless lieutenants. So great at length became the terror inspired by his ruthless deeds, and fright so magnified them that hundreds swore that there was not one Joaquin—but a dozen at the least. Sheriffs of counties hunted him with picked men. The Governor of the State offered vast rewards for his capture, dead or alive. Eventually he fell into the hands of a brave American, Captain Love, who secured him in the jail at Martinez, from which he was taken by force, and hung by a number of Mexicans. He was decapitated, and his head publicly exhibited in San Francisco.

In addition to this being a faithful narration of the fearful deeds of Joaquin, incidentally the work gives a faithful delineation of "life in the diggings" in the early days of California, when almost every nugget of gold was blood-spotted ere rude Justice bared her death-dealing arm.

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J. O A Q U I N ;

THE CLAUDE DUVAL OF CALIFORNIA.

THE sons are growing or grown up of the men who went it with a rush through the Golden Gates, by the different ways over the Camanche infested plains, by the sickly Chagres and the Isthmus innocent of railroad ears, for the treacherous mongrels to scowl at in '50 '51 and '52. There are many of the brave hearts, stout frames—spite of fever of camp and field—keen eyes, hands ready for friend and against foe, generous pockets, and welcoming laugh left—thanks to heaven of the Returned Californians. They are the ones who will not have to be more than this once reminded who JOAQUIN MURIETE was, that Red-handed Ravager, that King of Cut-throats, that Murderer of the Mines, that Pirate of the Placers, that deepest-cursed of greasers in gully and canon. From Maximilian's northernmost lines to the British Territories, from the Rocky Mountains to the beautiful Pacific, the blood-scored adventures, live yet, the celebrity is still well known for robbery and killing.

England does pretty well with her Jonathan Wilds, Captain Bloods, cruel highwaymen, and captains of other crews. Italy is all very well with her Mazzaronis, Rinaldo Rinaldinis, and Fras Diavolo (whom the opera makes fall into a trap that a gosling depredator would have smelt out, a cub-fox avoid and a chicken have fought its way out of.) And France may ring out its "la belle" to good (or bad) purposes with Cartouches, Mandrins, Scorchers and Flayers, just as Germany can gutterally chant the doing sof Robbers of the Rhine, who plundered to banquet on swine's flesh, beer, Bolognas, Limburger with or without speck, Schweitzer kaese and all, no less merrily than more fastidious bandits on wines and Capuan dainties.

But—very high, ruddy and glittering pile—it takes the land of Gold to "rake it." Joaquin is the implement in the croupier's hand.

To begin, no one, is to think El Dorado what it was from '48 to '52; not at all. The spirit never winced when Sacramento and Saint —— (any name in the calender) were flooded and washed to nothing, when "Charley the Chief" couldn't save "Frisco" from the flames, has converted the chaotic Eden into a proper paradise, where everything man can desire grows to more than perfection—from lovely and grand-hearted maid to luscious fruits. In the days of the fresh-comes, when many had broken bad English and worse French in chat with Capt. Sutter, had broken savings, (and hearts (?) may be) over the Bella Union tables, had broken the peace of dark señoritas who dropped coward native lovers for the fine, large Americans who stood twenty lassomen, with one six-shooter or a twelve-inch Bowie hilt and blade.

In those passed times, not pastimes by a long shot, the man was liberal who call the Shining Shore a civilized country, and he would not be believed either.

There were ugly crowds flocking there, and jail-birds, and those who ought to have been encaged, were plenty as wild prairie fowls in a Chicago market.

Too many Italians, who gave themselves out as broken-down water-fountain-stand keepers at Naples, Florentine money-changers reduced to the ranks of Lazaros by robberies on them, or Venetian gondoliers, were more than suspected of being beggars who had flourished daggers and flirted out pistols as spurs to charity.

Frenchmen there were who were reported to have revolutionized a little, without other authority than their own, principally devoting themselves to securing "funds for the cause,"—a cause which Jeanneton and Lamourdemarie, girls of caberets, were concerned in.

The Spaniards and such were merely ear-ringed sailors who had collided with first mates and had to hide from justice, till the first vessel sailed with them in the hold as stow-aways, in such seaports as kept gibbets standing; or were fellows indisposed to clean Havana's and Mexico's streets in a chain-gang as they feared would come to pass. The English when "chummed" together, might be overheard remembering in slang certain pocket-diving and crib-cracking feats, along with "lushing" in and about St. Luke's Whitechapel, Elephant and Castle, Golden Lane, King's Cross, and so on. The States' men hailed from the chief cities and did not recognize one another, but preferred strangers to mate off with instead of the acquaintances who accosted them so rudely and significantly on the wharf or plank walk: 'Hullo, ol' Mississip', whar am de cards dat allers turn Jack?—'Your term out, Ned? or did you jump Sing Sing?—'The deuce who'd a-think Charlestown would a-give you up so quick! 'Gaul darn ye, if 'taint Baltimore who forgot his name warn't Rob Smith an' went an' signed it to a promissory note! Well, I'm te-totally darned.' And Sidney skylarks floated over the Balboan waters, somehow or other.

And yet a number of these men, to counter-balance a number of the always accounted good, dropped what seemed a mask (though worn for years) and went to work with spiked pole, spade, pick, barrow, bowl, sieve and cradle as honest, industrious and steady as the best. Their reverse counterparts, losing their outfits and their money to live on in the saloons though they were clergymen's sons, rich, of high station and all that, went down the stream after a Niagara *fall*.

To this land of such strangely mingled people, came Joaquin Murieta at the opening of 1848.

He was born in Sonora's capital, in Mexico, of a family respectable enough, and sufficiently well off to give him a good education as education went in the priest-ridden country.

He was noticeable during his youth for the gentlest and most placid of natures; everybody who knew him in those days speaking rapturously of his then noble and generous spirit.

In '45, being sixteen years of age, Joaquin left his native place to seek his fortune in the capital of all the provinces, México.

As he was of good figure and not unpleasing bearing, he soon obtained the situation of squire in the wealthy household of President Lopez de Santa Anna.

Mean as was this post, the young blade was told that it might be merely the first round of a ladder reaching to eminence, for he was ambitious and a little chafed.

Santa Anna had always been a lover of horsemanship, a piece of information received gladly by Joaquin, who was somewhat noted in his parts as a vaquero for he had tamed wild horses time and again, not to say accomplished wonderfully the lesser feats of tossing bulls on their backs, lassoing, picking up handkerchiefs from the dust at full gallop.

He saw in the governor's passion a means of pointing out himself and doubtless of being promoted.

His elevated hopes did not come to effect as easily as he had anticipated. He had to lower his pretensions a little, besides, on account of the way in which his fellow riders discountenanced his attempts to shine above them.

One of these other horsemen was a Mexican named Camplido, who had often growled about the somewhat aristocratic airs which Joaquin had taken.

The latter saw the enmity growing, but pretended at first not to notice the sneers and scornful looks with which he was liberally favored: he minded his own business instead of letting himself be troubled with other affairs, an act of good sense that seems unrivalled in a Mexican.

So unrivalled that Camplido did not imitate him. He made his padre pray for an opportunity to come to him.

It came very soon. Joaquin was jumping up on his horse one day, not in a stately, regular mode according to rule, but after a savage style which he had caught from some Texan borderers. He lit fair and true in the saddle, but, in half turning to make sure that the crupper had not been displaced by his fall, lightly as it had been made, saw a grin on Camplido's face and half heard him saying something to a couple of fellows beside him.

"Did you speak to me?" cried Joaquin, turning pale and then red under his browned skin.

"Why, yes," replied Camplido, who, being a full grown man, was not going to let the little bantam hear him deny his crow. "And, if you want to know, Mister Sonorian, what I said, it only was: 'Carajo, what a clumsy way to bestride a nag.'"

"Clumsy!" echoed the other, holding in his mount, "it's an American way, which none of you inland cowards dare try with a wild mustang as *I* can."

And he proudly smiled at remembrance of the days when the herds of wild horses had been corraled and tamed by himself and his friends, boy though he was.

"That's it! speak well for the heathen Americans, the grasping, cowardly, lying race!" cried Camplido with all a Mexican's contempt for the people who had taken Texas and were afterwards to take more from the "sick man" of America.

"Heathens, no doubt," retorted Joaquin hotly. "Grasping, eh? yes, if you mean the Americans are men to grasp a friend's hand heartily and a foe's throat like a vice. Cowardly! oh, yes! Cowards generally do go trapping and hunting in the Indian territory, they do tackle 'Rapahoes seven to one, they do chase Comanches, they ten, the redskins a hundred and fifty and all braves; they do rescue poor girls stolen from the missions, out of Apache villages; that's the way of cowards, is it? They lie, do they, of course? They said they would settle Texas, and they didn't, eh? they said they would have there a republic, and they hoisted no lone star on the tall cedar-poles left standing in their clearings, oh, no! Seems to me their piece of Mexico counts one in the Union's twenty and odd states! Any how," concluded the Sonorian, with flushed cheeks and working hands, "I have not learnt bad horsemanship from such fearless riders, though they're not up to your mark, Senor Camplido. Suppose you see if *I* am."

"I'm willing," said the Mexican furious, "and I don't mind seeing if your little tender paws can handle a cuchillo of a man better than they do a bridle of a horse."

But the others prevented the contest being for the present any other than one of cavaliers.

"We must see the trial first," muttered one of the witnesses. "Caspita! they can cut throats afterwards."

On the appointed day, the whole household of the President got together, with the secret hope of having a laugh over the foregone discomfiture of the young Sonorian.

The two contestants opened performances with a couple of short runs, various tricks, rearings, prancings and all the artificial steps of the 'manege.' This was only to warm the blood of both horses and masters.

Leaping over an adobe wall, six feet high and three thick, with a hundred feet for start, without a graze of a horse's hoof to tell the story, was the finale. Camplido was first, and over he went to the cheers of his friends.

Joaquin was smiling to himself, for he was thinking of how he had often taken greater jumps over huge fallen trees, wide splits in the ground from earthquakes, broken and dethroned boulders, clumps of cactus and thick hedges of the chapparal.

He walked his horse on for fifty feet, and only began to gallop within half the prescribed distance.

As he neared the wall, ere he was within a yard of the holes in the earth made by the other jumper, he buried both his spurs in his steed's belly and up it went in the air. At the moment, a white sun-scarf, tied to the end of an escopette's ramrod, was floated in the up-rising and on-coming leaper's face.

The beast started, swerved, and, unable to prevent its spring, took the wall sideways and, as a natural result, kicked a couple of the rude bricks before its feet.

It all but fell, but the master had already slung one leg over its lowered head and dropped to the ground.

Everybody was laughing, as he turned round indignantly, and Camplido's throat was not the one that made the least noise.

Suddenly he lifted the be-scarfed rod which he still held, to parry a knife-thrust which was dealt at him. It was Canales, one of the grooms.

He had had the same trick served on him at his own first entering the service and, though strongly suspecting the author, had never found it out beyond doubt.

Now it was he who sprang upon laughing Camplido.

But Joaquin, leaving his quivering horse with a "So-hoa!" to him, rushed forward in time to knock up a down-stroke which would beyond doubt have made the traitor pay with his life for his act of baseness.

Joaquin declared that he alone would spill blood in his own defence, if that must be, but, as it was, he did not care to have one drop of such a miserable life-current let out of so worthless a man.

He mounted his horse slowly, to give Camplido a chance to show what little courage he might have, but there was no movement on the latter's part.

Then, smiling scornfully, he leaped his horse quietly over the wall, clean this time, and rode out of the court-yard gate, never to enter it again.

When returned to his own country, he was determined to cast aside all his ambitious desires and live happily and placidly in the charming hot sunshine of Sonora.

Nevertheless, in the month of January, 1848, Joaquin did leave the province and went to San Francisco, in quest of a brother of his named Carlos, who—since sometime residing in Upper California—had obtained from one of the district governors, a piece of land of four square leagues.

Joaquin in vain made inquiries; he could not even gain any intelligence of him, and had to return home. To make up for that supposed loss, he had not long been back than he married a young Sonoran girl, Carmela Felix.

At the end of a year's wedded life, he received a letter from his brother, in which he was begged to hurry to the Mission of San Jose.

Carlos added that great quantities of gold had been discovered in the mountains and that if Joaquin wanted to make a fortune, all he had to do was to lose no time in reaching the placers.

Joaquin instantly got ready for the journey, but the illness of his father and other family matters delayed his setting out by some ten months.

Then he started, accompanied by his wife.

When he arrived at San Francisco, Joaquin was so immensely astounded at the change that had taken place since his former visit, that he made up his mind to spend several days there to see how the new comers would open their new life.

So he sauntered around among the shanties and tents and one or two patent take-to-pieces-and-put-together-again houses, that were run up like card-board palaces, watching the ships being unloaded slowly, for they were dreadfully short-handed and the most monstrous wages for 'longshoremen were laughed at by the out-at-elbow-and-knee loungers even.

On the second day, in one of the gambling-saloons, already busy in fleecing the floor idlers, who had made their pile even that early, and thought to risk a few ounces while waiting for a homeward bound craft, Joaquin met his brother.

The latter had the bad news to tell him that, by some flaw in his title, some of the adventurers had taken away from him the four leagues of granted land.

He was going to the mines to hunt up a witness of whom he had need, after which they two would go to Mexico in order to see the giver of the concession and recover the property, if that was possible at that stage of disorder. Joaquin expressed a great desire to go to the mines to see about the gold.

Carlos was only too glad to have him along with him, but—as he knew something of the roughness of the camp-life where all were men—he counseled Joaquin to leave his wife at the Dolores Mission under guard of an old friend there Manuel Sepulveda.

The very next day, the two brothers went up to Sacramento, where they bought horses to go to Hangtown.

They found the witness that Carlos was after, there.

He was a young native Californian called Flores.

He was fresh from a miners' camp some distance off, which he had left to come down to sell gold dust.

After supper at a Mexican eating-house, Flores borrowed Joaquin's mule and went out for a stroll with Carlos.

Joaquin, a little out of sorts from the journeying over roads so bad and the change of water (for liquor was so valuable that the creeks supplied two-thirds of the contents of bottles of mezcal and aguardiente), stayed in the house smoking cigarettes, contemplating the grand invasion of Americans into this lately rich domain of Mexico.

He had become acquainted with many of the Northerners during the late war and, full of disgust at so often having seen the imbecility of his fellow countrymen, had preserved a most favorable impression of the American character, often regretting that he had not been born under the stars and stripes.

He contrasted his lazy, cowardly, treacherous, lying countrymen with the men of the Republic, so energetic, active, brave, and so filled with love of liberty.

If it had not been for his little happy, peaceful home so picturesquely embosomed in one of the most charming vales of Sonora, which he little dreamed would ever become part of the Republic, he would have for ever flung aside his nationality to become in fact what he was in heart, an American Citizen.

All of a sudden, Joaquin's reflections were broken into by wild yells from some hundreds of people who were thronging the streets, if you have a mind to call them that, and giving tongue in cries of:

"String 'em up! hang 'em, hang 'em! Rope 'em quick, Pete! No Judge Lynch for the greasers caught in the act!"

Joaquin sprang out of the cabin but only in time to behold two quivering bodies dangling almost touching one another from the same bough of a tree. It was his brother and Flores.

A couple of ragged rascals who had followed the two brothers from San

Francisco, with trumped-up receipts, had claimed the mules they had been riding and sworn that the animals had been stolen from them.

Such was the fury of the mob, (for of course, where no law was except the unnoticed Mexican alcaldes' which was too easily tampered with, justice had to be dealt by themselves), that the victims had no chance to clear themselves, and all their endeavors to put in a word of defence were drowned by the curses and groans of the crowd. They were pulled off their horses, a couple of long grazing-halters found somewhere flung over their heads as they were made to stand on barrel heads; these scaffolds were kicked from under them, and thus they died.

The two false accusers, bestriding the animals still warm in reins and saddle from the innocent and real owners, rode off as quickly as possible, after treating the crowd at the nearest rum-hole.

Struck with horror and astonishment, Joaquin could do no more at first than cast one glance on the bodies and the dispersing executioners to assure himself that the sight was undesirably real; then, bursting into tears and restraining himself from giving way to dangerous weakness, he procured a mule and returned to Sacramento, on the way to San Francisco, and thence to the Mission, where he embosomed himself of the awful story to his wife. It made her shudder; but, with the eagerness of woman, she conjured her husband not to follow the path vengeance streaked out to him with blood, but to leave to heaven the punishment of the villains sure sooner or later to overtake them. She assured him that all Americans were not, could not be as bloodthirsty as the assassins of her brother-in-law.

With all the strength of her sincerely loving heart, she besought him not to yield to criminal designs. Her tears, supplications and words of affection and consolation worked a great change in Joaquin's intentions, and lulled his heart into forgetfulness of the misdeed.

"So be it," said he kissing her, "I yield to my good angel. All is over. Let's forget and be happy. As soon as I shall have gathered a little gold, we will go home never to leave it more."

A few days afterwards, accompanied by his wife, he reached the mines on the Stanislaus River, where he put up a cabin and began "wet diggings."

The district was extremely lively, agitated by a great number of wretches who, covering themselves with the cloak of being Americans "down on yellow bellies, by G—!" worked only by fits and starts, patrolling the country, and eyeing the native Californians and Mexicans who did throw off sluggishness and take to labor, with a hateful eye, while regarding them as a conquered race, good only when others had the whip-hand of them.

This scum did all they could to fan the flames of prejudice of color and the innate antipathy of such opposite races.

One day, a gang of such loafing desperadoes, having been thrashed soundly by an allied party of Americans and Englishmen forming the "United E Pluribus Dieu et mon Unum Droit Mining Company," and smarting to find somebody to be revenged on, came across solitary Joaquin and coolly ordered him to clear from his claim, as they had made up their mind never to let a man of his skin scrape gold in that region.

As a show of his papers did no good, and his string of oaths more harm, he told the shouting band plump that he'd see every man Jack of 'em at the bottom of a Nevadan ravine with a ten-foot sand-drift covering them, before he'd let a spade or a pick that had no business there break earth on his ground.

Weapons flashed out, thereupon. There was a scuffle. The poor wife rushed out, handsome in her terror and grief, to behold her husband senseless on the ground from a hail of blows from pistol-butts. The miscreants seized her. When Joaquin came to life at the dusk, Carmela was more than dead, dishonored!

CHAPTERII.

THE STOLEN HORSE.—THE FIRST BLOOD.—THE BAND IS FORMED.—MURDER OF SHERIFF CLARK.—YUBA ON THE TRAIL.

IMAGINE the feelings of the unfortunate Joaquin.

Naturally, vengeance sent his blood up to boiling heat, but he had enough coolness left to know that he could not single-handed quench his thirst for re-prisal: that would be risking life and liberty for one or two deaths alone. He forced himself to wait and grin and bear it all until some chance should aid him to carry out his ideas.

In April, 1850, he went into Calaveras County and tried his hand at Murphy's Diggings; but, seeing that he was not of the temperament that a good gold-hunter must be, he gave up the wash-bowl and rocker and took to the less honest and far less honorable monte table.

Mexicans do not consider that so very disgraceful, however, as we may as well say. At first blush, fortune more than smiled, laughed on him and began to make the gold coins roll over decks of cards into the folds of his sash and the pockets of his inner calzoneras, while his hat's lining was not innocent of some Bank of England notes that he had bought as more convenient than the solid stuff, in spite of the chant he heard so frequently in the saloons, the classical "Shove her up, shove her up to the bolt, I'd rather have an ounce than a twenty-dollar note, for the slug it will sink and the flimsy 'll float, so I'd rather have," etc.

But, after going down the hill gaily, he had to go up toilsomely and had to lighten his load. If he had dropped his gains into the melting pot, he could hardly have had them more speedily melted away.

He rolled into the depths of the gulf of crime.

One day, he had been visiting a friend out of town, so to say, and had returned riding a horse which Valenzuela his friend had loaned him. Just as he entered the encampment-village of Murphy's Diggings, somebody raised a hullabaloo, a crowd surrounded him and stopped him.

"Hoss-thief!" cried Westerner. "I swan if 'taint my maire Kezi'ah, if 'tis shaved pesky close and the fly-brush docked," yelled a Yankee. "Give the fellow a hearing," said a Pennsylvanian. "Give the beggar a jolly good hiding," roared an Englishman. "Smother him, the bastely Mixican," said a Patlander louder than all.

Everybody knew the animal, and all Joaquin could do was swear that he had only borrowed it, and that no doubt Valenzuela had innocently come into possession. Half the crowd, with the Westerner on his recovered horse, sped away to confront Valenzuela. The rest, after listening for a few moments to the asseverations of Joaquin, were going to let him off with threats alone, when several, who had seen him idling about and only busy when cards in hand, insisted on giving him a round dozen lashes as a slight warning for him to quit those diggings.

So they tied up the luckless young man to a tree, and an English sailor, who knew something of cats, rigged up a whip from an old hairless buffalo robe, and inflicted the whipping. They let the flogged Sonorian go, then. It was lucky for him, for the others returned before long from Valenzuela's shanty. He had been unable to satisfy them, and they had run him up to the lowermost branch of a cedar, and had hurried back to give his supposed accomplice a similar necklace.

Joaquin's passionate spirit underwent a fearful change never to be altered

afterwards. Any barrier whatever lost power over his raging heart. He took an oath only to live thenceforth for revenge and to mark his steps in blood. He could not discriminate in his general scheme, and included all the Saxons in his doom-roll.

Not very long afterwards the stout Englishman, who had proposed the "jolly hiding," was leisurely strolling into the thinned out woods, on a fine evening.

As he descended into the ravine crossing the narrow path, he found himself unexpectedly face to face with Joaquin, whom he could not help remembering. The eyes of the sallow youth flashed like a tawny tiger's, and a shudder made his whole frame vibrate.

The Briton was fascinated for the moment, but, noting the trembling of the other, he set it down to the fear the latter might have of being captured again.

"I ain't a-goin' to tetch yer, friend Spaniard," said he, and he pushed on to pass him, almost unconcernedly.

Joaquin, side by side with him, did draw aloof from the path as though to give him passage, but it was really to have a fair sweeping stab at the man's side.

"Oh!" and the stout fellow reeled and clapped one hand to his breast, while the other felt in his belt.

"Die! die!" yelled Joaquin, foaming at the mouth and tearing away at his victim with his left hand, while his right brought down the dagger again and again till the victim was borne to the ground.

"What've I done to you, you butcher?" muttered the dying man. "Mercy —spare!"

"Did you spare me," returned Joaquin, pressing at the gasping throat and winding himself round the other's sturdier form like a liana round a tamarack, or a snake round a stung prairie dog; "did you spare me when you wanted them to whip me like a horse, when you had a whole crowd to back you against me, one innocent man? Was you full of mercy then? I didn't see you telling them to lay on the lashes more lightly, or to be short in the number prescribed! No, by our Lady of Suffering, my brother and my wife are dead through just such devils as you, and I'll out-devil ye, by G—! You've set me a-fire by calling to mind my Carmela! (stab!) my brother! (stab!) Die, die! wretch!"

Mad, Joaquin kept on perforating and hacking the temple, out of which by too many entries already the soul had fled, and he only stopped at last when his soaked sleeve, and streaming knife wet his painted and tired hand.

"There, that begins my work of death," said he, getting up from the pool of blood in which the murdered man almost floated.

Joaquin's teeth chattered convulsively, his body was drawn up to its full height, and he swept with fired eye the beautiful azure dome of the Californian sky. His clenched, stained hand still brandished the clotted blade.

"Number one of the doomed at my feet!" cried he. "Now that I've had a taste of the feast, I'll keep at it till I clear the table! Oh, dearly-loved Carmela, if your pure, too-soon fled spirit seeks revenge, watch over me and protect me in your battles as much as mine. Carlos, brother, poor, dead brother, put your strength in my arm!"

Next morning, the first party out after firewood found the corpse, which, although so horribly mangled, was recognised.

As he had been so prominent in the chastisement of the supposed partner in the horse-theft, was a good enough fellow otherwise, and did not seem to have been robbed, the crime was attributed to the true author, which fact did not much encourage an idea of the Mexicans not being of an assassinating turn of mind.

A little later, a doctor, who was coming to Murphy's with "Salvator's Specific for spasmodic fevers," and other quick remedies, galloped in among the workmen to the music of gasps for help, a clatter of broken bottles and the

neighing of his mare, on whose flanks the camphene, spirits and gums of the let-out medicines had streamed, soaking through the saddle-bags.

He had met a couple of Mexicans on horseback, who had no sooner exchanged a "Buena tarde!" with him than they drew pistols and blazed away. His nag had an ear tipped, and he received a bullet through his tall felt hat; he was saved by a small inch.

He had not, as might be expected, taken a daguerreotype (photographs were unknown) of the marksmen, but he had remarked enough of the better shot of the two for him to be proclaimed, on that description, to be the Englishman's murderer, Joaquin.

There was a general excitement among the set who had been chiefs of the torturers of the Sonorian, and some of *them* felt such dread creep over them and weigh upon them that they were noticed to be always with friends and not apt to pass the last tent of the encampment.

Those that did not care went and came as ever, but, somehow or other, a mysterious unavoidable fate hung over them and hardly were they out of sight and earshot of help, then death fell sharp and unerring upon them.

Consternation began to spread. Every new arrival had a report to make of a dead body or two having been encountered on the road, "knifed or bulletted," and it was always found that the victims were those who had had something to do with the whipping of Joaquin.

Judge Lynch called together a court, and the Sonorian was outlawed, and compelled to find security only in flight or in a continuance of his murderous career.

As he could not well accomplish his black plans without money and horses, he had to add theft to his other crime. Thus was he a highwayman before he was twenty.

So, in 1851, the band of robbers that ravaged the country was well known to be commanded by Joaquin.

Prospecting parties and others changing from mine to mine were rarely so strong as not to be stopped on the way and made to deliver.

The returners from the diggings were eased of their hard-earned treasure and considered themselves lucky if they were let go back to resume work, half stripped and with nothing to pledge to procure tools.

Most of the lonely travelers, and especially Johnny Newcomes who were not up to the new life, were torn from their saddles by lariats and pulled into the brush to be "stuck" and rifled at leisure.

Horses vanished from the ranches, of which not a few were burnt, and King, Queen or President Pillage (just as you like) began to act as if he, or she, ruled the Golden State.

Joaquin's intelligence and superior education, very naturally, had almost instantly won for him respect from his comrades. He cunningly made an appeal to the rankling against the "Yankees," as the stupid Mexicans styled all the fair complexioned and States' people, whether from Red River of the North, the Rio Grande, the Merrimac, the Hudson or all along the Ohio, the Mississippi and the shore of the Great Lakes.

The disastrous result of the Texan War had been very peppery dish for them to digest, and, by the call of Joaquin, he collected many fellow countrymen, respectable in numbers if in nothing else. His undreamt-of successes recruited his ranks day after day, till his slight form had a train to it like a slave clipper followed by sharks.

Among his followers, was to be remarked a young stripling of the name of Reynardo Felix, own brother to Joaquin's wife, who burned like his near kinsman to avenge her dreadful death. He was one of the lieutenants, and got his name up by his repeated exploits at the head of a troop, side by side with that

of Three-fingered Jack, another bandit who had come to Joaquin's standard from sheer love of blood-spilling.

This Mexican "Obi" was more of a fiend than a human being. He was known in Mexico as Manuel Garcia, where he had had one finger cut off in a skirmish of guerrillas, who had been a little mistaken in an idea which they had had of catching a detachment of Uncle Sam's "blue-bellies" napping; hence the nickname he sported in El Dorado.

It was he, who, in '46, in company with half a dozen other cutthroats, fell upon two Americans on the road from Sonora to Bodega, stripped them to the skin and tortured them in so many and such ways that the papers never dared print all: slicing them with daggers, cutting out their tongues and eyes, and concluding by roasting their still animated, but lacerated bodies, over a slow fire of green wood.

We may as well name here, as being satellites of Joaquin, Pedro Gonzales, Luis Guerra, Juan Cardoza and Joaquin Valenzuela, fearless fellows—when they outnumbered the foe or were cornered, cunning—but every coward's that, hardened to fatigue by a life of poverty and laziness, ardent for vengeance.

The last named was brother to the man who had been hanged on the day when Joaquin had been flogged. He had served a good while in Mexico with Guerra, in the guerrillero band of Padre Jurata, a monk who had forgotten vows of abstinence and goodness made under the crucifix to make money and torture women under the lancier's red flag.

Gonzalez, above-mentioned, whose principal qualification was a knowledge of horseflesh—of which he ought to have known some trifles, from his having stampeded and stolen so many of them—was charged to keep the company of cutthroats always well mounted.

Besides, he carried on the besetting and courageous business of a sneaking spy and, from whatever quarter the band thought of visiting, sent in an exact report of the state of it, to procure which he hung around Regulators, Committees of Vigilance, Redressors, Lynchers, Shirt-tail Bend Justices, as closely as he could without being hung up.

Joaquin's command was composed of no less than five-and-forty men then, but every week saw additions from Sonora and Lower California, along with roamers of the Gila, who had found meddling with Bill Williams's, Kit Carson and other marksmen whose pieces carried six to eight dead shots to a pound, did not "pay," in this world, at least. Leading this powerful flock of vultures, Joaquin, in the course of the year '51, rattled over the State, which was more gold than "grizzly" to him just then, when the black sand was "half and half" auriferous dust in the common bowl, when cradles had their receiver covered with a quarter inch of pea-size pepitas, when the veins made lucky chaps jump and treat a crowd of thirty on the strength of "opening so rich," when "salting" claims to catch the pig-tail Celestials hardly was tried, folks were selfish and let strangers be butchered and plundered within a few miles of them. Too many said:

"The h—! that bloody greaser's killed another on the Smitty's Flats! Blast the show-no-fights! let Joe Quin, or Walk-in, or whatever he's called, come an' lay paw on our waist-belts an' I'll be dog gone'd but he'll be cracked like those finger-long fleas the Irishman left us in this here shanty we bought o' him. Fetch him on hereaway!"

The numerous persons with whom the King of Cutthroats was on a good footing could not suspect, seeing him so frequently among them, that this young man had any share in the sanguinary deeds which were past count by this time and which affected a whole state. He remained whole weeks in one place, spending his time in gaming, utterly unknown for what he was. For instance, in the summer of 1851, while he was living in a remote house in the

town of San Jose, he was arrested one night for being concerned in a "muss" happening at the heat of a midnight fandango.

The magistrate, before whom they were all brought, sentenced him to a fine of twelve dollars. Joaquin desired Sheriff Clark, in whose charge he was placed, to come along with him to his dwelling, where he would count out the sum and a little more for the trouble he had caused. They went side by side, chatting gaily, but, as soon as they came to a spot that offered concealment, Joaquin whipped out his knife, quickly told Clark that he had only led him there to slay him, and gave him a death-wound before the Sheriff could draw the Derringer on which he had already laid his hand. Mr. Clark had made himself hated as well as feared by the highwaymen from the careful watch which he had kept over their attempts in his district and as he had come several times unpleasantly near to arresting some of them, their leader had thus taken advantage of his opportunity to clear the stream of that top-sawyer.

Some months thereafter, Joaquin settled for the time being near that bunching of tents and huts known under the *sonorous* title of Sonorian Camping-ground, three or four miles out from Marysville.

Pretty soon, everybody began to talk of murders, as frequent as diabolical. From the seventh to the twelfth of November, 1851, in a stretch of land not more than a dozen miles each way, there were no less than eleven persons found slaughtered by the mysterious troop.

The stout hearts of Marysville, as generous to avenge as brave to act, determined not to let the crimes drop to the ground as had been done in other places.

A company was formed to run down and hand over to justice those who shed so much guiltless blood.

Poor fellows! brave-hearted men who had left happy homes to seek a fortune for loved wife and children, to be slain at the threshold of the riches which their strong arms, nerved with honest desire, affection and industry, would have surely given them!

The avengers thought—for this struck *home* to them—of women waiting, waiting for letters that never came, for husbands, brothers, sons that never came. Next steamer, sure! No? then, next ship that comes round the Horn. No? Then, he's crossing the plains, no roads, Indians, something's delayed him. Oh, he's sure to come! he *must* come!

Poor hopeful ones! you are surer to meet him, than he you. There's a bit of plank mouldering away in the bank of a golden sandy stream, there's a big stone on this hillock's side, a heap of pebbles on that road; nicknames scrawled affectionately if rudely by loving "mates" who laid aside tools to take the red chalk in horny fingers, are all those poor gravestones bear, and no one knows, though they may guess, that for little "Pet Pete" a heart broke slowly and sadly in the East; that for "Georgia Ned" the Etowah River bore a self-drowned darling of a brunette on the way to the Coosa and the Gulf, if the garfish, had not attacked it and canoemen recovered it toadden a whole plantation with; that for this, that or the other unknown, she with the golden hair wasted away in that city, she with the black curls is a widow unmarried, she with the brown tresses is grey before thirty.

Enough that the Redressors felt this far better than we can say, and were untiring of foot.

After many day's researches, they only found, not far from the muddy ripple of the creek, six men, dead, with that livid circle round the neck and horridly distorted features which betrayed the lasso.

The whole of Yuba County was overrun, and yet not trace was found of the murderers. The party returned to Marysville, disbanding with regret.

But, the very next day, news spread that several persons had been killed and despoiled near Bidwell's Bar, whereupon the excitement grew greater.

Few dared to travel.

Suspicious began to settle towards the Camp of the Sonorians, exclusively occupied by Mexicans as it was, for—without much striking with picks or dabbling in the river's sands—a great number of them possessed steeds of value, magnificent serapes or blankets, costly Panamas, plenty of jewelry and gold in large quantities.

Buchanan, Sheriff of Yuba County, set out on one beautiful moonlight night, with Ike Bowen, to have an inspection of the place, and to arrest three very suspicious fellows who were known to be in that neighborhood.

But, as they were getting over a stockade, four Mexicans sprang upon them unawares and the Sheriff fell to the ground seriously wounded with a pistol bullet through the body.

The Mexicans took to flight at the charge of Ike, who turned and attacked them single-handed. Buchanan, carried back to Marysville by his companion, was a long time in danger, but eventually recovered. The consequence of this affair was that the ravagers did not stay any longer in those parts.

They stole off to the western side of Mount Shasta, where they kept secluded for several months, only going down into the valleys at rare intervals to steal horses. Few miners passed through that retired region, but, nevertheless, there were found more than one bleached skeleton of human beings.

Some bore no trace of how they had been put to death, but the splintered holes and the dislocated vertebral of others revealed the secret work of lasso and bullet.

CHAPTER III.

TRIP INTO SONORA.—CARMELA'S SUCCESSOR.—IN THE OLD NEST AGAIN.—DEFIANCE IN THE HELL.

As the first days of the spring of '52 came on, Joaquin and his band descended from the highlands, with nearly three hundred horses stolen during the rainy season. Taking care only to travel by night, they led this drove through the southern part of the state into the province of Sonora. On their return after a few weeks, the depredators pitched their head-quarters in the magnificent country of richest pastures, known as Arroyo Cantuva.

It was a vale of seven or eight thousand acres in extent, well watered and enclosed all around by a belt of mountains, which had no other gap than one, where the plunderers could hold an army at check. This fertile hollow is situated between the passes of Pacheco and Tejon, east of the main range and west of Tulan Lake.

Wholly hidden by the pile of rock, it formed a refuge all the more sure from no dwelling being within fifty leagues.

Game abounded there: the grizzly often clattered with his long claws over the granite, deer, antelopes, big-horns, mountain sheep, the pretty plumed California quails, wood-cock, and a whole series of lesser animals seemingly put there for the food of man. Hence, as far as eating went, theives had a good time of it.

Under the speading foliage of a clump of evergreens, the young chief fixed his cabin.

More than once, he was to be seen, in the cool of a fine day, reclining on the carpet of verdant sward which Nature had smoothly laid over the floor of that Eden; by his side was a young woman, fair and affectionate, of whom he had made the conquest in his late visit to Sonora.

Clarina, for that was her name, was the daughter of Don Sebastian Vallero, a

grandee of Spain who after having impoverished himself through his excessive prodigality, had withdrawn to Mexico with the modest remnant of his fortune, where he had purchased a piece of ground quite near the rancho of Joaquin's father.

The first time that the girl was led into contact with the youth, though he was but fifteen and she ten then, she could not help admiring—for the girls are women very early under 30 degrees north latitude—the graceful figure and alluring face of Joaquin, as well as the ease and elegance with which he managed his half-wild horse; everytime that they met, she could not help gazing on him in passion akin to worship.

But the youth's large blue eyes only answered with an indifferent glance a shade mocking, and the bright red flush of his cheeks did not have so pure a cause as the gentle but deep blush that suffused her features.

The poor little romantic thing had felt her heart leap often and often again while reading the old tales of the knight errants; and her governess had only fed her poetical learning by teaching her many of the favorite ballads and legends of antique Spain.

A couple that were all the time rising to her lips in her perfumed breath were:

“ While his hand lightly struck the mandoline,
Came singing so joyful the troubadour;
‘ Spared from Saracen’s blades in Palestine
I turn to my love like hawk to the lure.’ ”

“ At the door of her grand house
Stood the gentle damsel,
Spying with her great black eyes
‘ The youths who loved her so well.’ ”

When she watched every morning the departure of Joaquin and his fellows nothing was easier for Clarina to imagine than that the party was one of chevaliers going out to battle; but, on the return, it was impossible for her to fancy that it was her love’s esquire, that young man who brought no trophies to her and was far from coming to kneel at her feet. Grief and melancholy overcame her and tears obscured the diamond lustre of her eyes in which they swam till dropping from the long lashes, roses she had gathered—for him who never held out a finger for them—fell to her feet while her hand, empty of them, rose to her bosom.

So she sorrowed, unable to tell or even hint at her emotion.

Some years later, as Joaquin was on the point of quitting the paternal roof with the woman of his choice and was bidding farewell to his friends and relations, Clarina, her heart ready to burst with sadness, thrust a gold ring on Joaquin’s finger and—as he looked at her startled and in inquiry—she, like a woman, ran away to her room to seek relief in prayer and tears.

Joaquin saw in this jewel merely a mark of friendship intended for his wife and he hastened to hand it over to her; but, perceiving that the circlet seemed to be one of those precious talismans to which the Castilian nobles attach such value, Carmela refused it and begged her husband to wear it for her sake.

“ The trinket may have some virtue unknown to us, and perhaps will be a shield in some hour of peril,” she said superstitiously.

Joaquin smiled incredulously, at the time, but he never gave over wearing the asserted charm until the fatal hour preceding his death.

Once, however, he did forget it, and that was the day on which he was so shamefully treated at Murphy’s Diggings.

The gem had been left in his room among other jewelry in a casket. Since then, Joaquin, obeying the promptings of superstition, could not doubt that the little round had in verity power to preserve him from dangers.

When Joaquin went home, he spent the first day and the morning of the next

in visits to old neighbors, to whom he could naturally make many rich presents out of his store of stolen goods.

As soon as the heat of the day was over, and the exquisite hours came when the feeling in the shade of the woods can only be expressed by the words "just right," Joaquin strolled into the forest to treat himself to the re-awakening of pleasant memories.

He gazed enchanted on the endless clumps of different cactus, on the nopalas in blossom, on palmettos, pines, cedars, oaks, dogwoods, on pond lilies, rushes, reeds and all the varieties of grass befringing the waters of Capivi Creek.

Its now rapid running current washed the luxuriantly budded sides with its back-waters, and reflected the taller trees in its depths. Myriads of birds most brightly feathered hovered overhead, darted from side to side, fluttered close to the ground or sprang from bough to bough in the scented air, that mingled its odors with the multitude of songs.

Every now and then, a long fish, pursued by same chuckle-headed bristling-jawed enemy eager for dinner, would spring out of the eddy and glitter in a slanting sunbeam, silver-white, golden-yellow or steel-blue. And sometimes, a hawk or eagle—though oftener the king-fisher—would give a scream that sent all the songsters scuttling under cover, and, after a sweep or two, drop like a heaven-shot dart, skim the ruffled whirls and streaks and rise into air once more with a luckless wriggling plate of silver, hooked and nailed by the beak. The wood-peckers were at work in the far-off, everywhere, tattooing trees to come at the grubs.

Joaquin felt gradually stealing over him a forgetfulness of the immediately past, but a strengthening of boyhood's recollections. He pelted the screaming birds with pebbles (perhaps valuable, for Sonora has wonders yet to unfold), listened enraptured to the warbling of others, snapped off a cluster of berries here, sliced a fruit there, drank at a spring, leaped over stones, swung himself by creepers, and carried on like a boy, in a word.

No one would ever have believed him a bandit chief. He had left the stream unconsciously, and desirous of regaining it, he let himself yield to a species of fit of sprightliness, and ran at full speed down an open hill upon the very bank.

He just was able to pull up short there and not take an unpremeditated dive, when a half suppressed scream, as if caused by the swish of the pebbles which his feet had shot into the ripple, attracted his eyes to the other side. It is unnecessary to say that those eyes, thither drawn, were rivetted there in ravishment.

A young girl had raised that cry of surprise. She had been dressing, and was half attired, on the wavelet's edge, when he had made the rush to the place.

So he saw in disarray, trembling but fascinated to the spot, a female form youthful and beautiful. Face, neck and arms darker than the rest of the faultlessly proportioned frame, but that of a warm, tempting tint.

Fine and delicate features, magnificent black hair but not as silky as it might be, for the sun seemed to have robbed it of gloss, eyes superior to Indian's or Mexican's, velvety in the pupil somehow or other at the same time as liquid, and lustrous, the pearly teeth revealed from the mouth being parted with surprise, most lithesome of forms, a child's feet and hands—all more than half uncovered—that's the picture that appeared to Joaquin.

Only for the briefest space, though, for the scream was repeated, and, catching up the rest of her apparel, the beauty darted into the wood.

So suddenly was she seen, so briefly viewed, so abruptly gone, that the young man almost doubted his vision. But the floating of a scarf and some other part of attire dropped in the fugitive's haste, were proofs of reality.

"By heaven, I must see her again!" muttered Joaquin.

As he spoke, he kicked off his riding boots, flung them over the creek, wound his blanket round him to shield his pistols, and such a vigorous spring

into the water that he cleared the line separating the side-tow from the main line.

It was hard swimming in the current, and the delay it caused him in reaching the other shore, as well as a coolness which the stream, running under trees rather than laying under the sun, possessed, set him thinking of the two or three splashes he heard round and about him.

"It'll look well for Joaquin the Terror of the Miners to be dragged under by a caiman or stung by a water-snake!" muttered he, redoubling his efforts.

He reached land presently. The black spots on the surface that had caused him anxiety were only bits of rotten limbs tumbled in from trees. He ran along breast deep into the whirls till he recovered the objects.

"Silk and first rate," muttered he examining the scarf; "no common girl, then. I wonder who she is. So lovely—Caramba! She didn't have her feet covered—poor little dear—and I think I'll find her near."

He trailed the fugitive for a short ways, but lost the track.

"D— if her steps ain't light as air," he murmured. "I say, friend, young lady, senorita! I am a gentleman won't hurt you—here, here!"

But no answer came to his calls. A little chilled by the soaking he had got, though his pistols had not been wetted through the blanket, he, grumbling at the vanished one's fear but reveling in remembrance of her beauty, was slowly tracing his route through the underwood when a shriek, most intense and far-reaching, came to his ears.

"The deuce! can some of my rascals be on the loose and met her!" cried he, frowning and laying his hand on his weapons.

Like a dart, he flew through thorns and creepers. At last, he saw the white drapery of the beauty, who was dressed now.

But, most singularly she was not looking back at him, although she could hardly help hearing his swift coming.

She stood firm as a statue, but quivering like a leaf, her limbs close together, her body drawn back, one arm across her bosom and the fingers half veiling some awful thing from her view, while the other hand was put forward outside of that to repel the same cause of dread.

"Courage!" said Joaquin, suspecting the whole, and advancing less noisily though no less rapidly.

A dark round line twisted into the form of an S with an extra curl at the foot of it terminating in a wiry point and another flourish at the top bearing a head with spiteful beads of glaring eyes and a vibrating tongue, rested itself on a rotted plantain leaf.

It eyed the girl, and she it.

At the sound of the man's steps, the serpent moved, altered its S into an upside down f (J), and was about to disappear.

A low "Ah!" of relief escaped from the girl's lips.

"No, you don't!" cried Joaquin, springing forward.

The reptile stopped and turned its head fearlessly around, and darted out its shiny red tongue, as much as to say it made no difference at all whether it was asked to stay or was let go on.

"No, no," exclaimed the girl, finding speech, and laying her hand on Joaquin's arm, "its a moccasin snake!"

But the young man shook off the gentle hold, fell upon one knee within two yards of the serpent, and leveled the revolver which he had drawn. The snake drew up its folds calmly, and lengthened its wavy tongue more and more.

Joaquin saw what was coming, but seemed to be too sure of his triumphing to care for that.

"Quick!" the girl uttered in horror as she saw the deadly animal move, but her words were drowned by a sharp report.

The moccasin, received in the very act of springing by the bullet and a line of

fire and smoke fell to the ground, the tail-half perfect enough, but the head and rest blown into pieces which blackened and spotted the leaves and ground.

That snake was harmless henceforth, for the poison-bag even had been burst to nothing.

Now, the rescued girl was Clarina.

Fancy the walk towards home of the two.

She had remarked, first thing, that her ring was upon her deliverer's finger, and she did not hesitate to jump at the conclusion that he loved her.

So she confessed the state of her heart at the opening of their conversation.

While Joaquin had been in California, he had kept his family informed of most of what happened to him and his, so that Clarina was aware of his wife being dead and, moreover, that he had become a notorious bandit. But, notwithstanding his undoubtedly criminal career, Clarina was enamoured of him still.

He, for his part, had been inspired with his glimpse of her bathing, that he yielded to her influence and found it no hard matter to throw himself at her knees and declare that his first love was only a died away passion and that this time was the first that he knew what true affection was.

Hence, the two are found by us, seated on the moss and grass under the trees of Arroyo Cantuva. Carmela's name was already forgotten, and all her tenderness, faithfulness and devotion were banished from the robber's mind.

After several weeks spent at their headquarters, Joaquin divided his troops, then composed of seventy-five, into detachments, of which he gave the commands to Valenzuela, Luis Guerra and Three-fingered Jack, sending them to fall upon certain points.

Their order was to employ their time solely in running off horses and mules, his attention being to put into execution a plan of his that required from fifteen hundred to two thousand of the cattle.

He started off himself in another direction, accompanied by Reynardo, Felix, Juan Cardoza, and Pedro Gonzalez. Three women disguised as men and well armed like their escorts, formed part also of this company: the first was Clarina, and the others the respective mistresses of Felix and Gonzales. All were admirably mounted

None except the chief knew the aim of their course.

On arriving at Mokelumne Hill, Calaveras County, they mingled with the Mexicans who dwelt there, all of whom were friendly as a matter of course, and, when they went the rounds of the gaming hells or traveled the streets, it was impossible to distinguish them from the more honest inhabitants of the place. The women re-assumed the habiliments of their sex and behaved themselves so excessively well that they became almost wonders on that account. The men went out on expeditions every little while on their splendid horses and always made a long circuit before returning to their rendezvous.

Joaquin had the semblance of a gambler in high feather, as his nocturnal rovings gave him the means to appear.

This was April, 1852.

Meanwhile, the other divisions were pursuing ardently their mission in the different quarters, and Joaquin found in the papers (the humble parents of the well-conducted, enterprising journals of the present day) full accounts and pleasing ones to him of how ranches had been rid of stock to a great extent.

Besides, the public sheets did not hesitate to lay the whole on his shoulders.

In the different murders and thefts in which he had taken a personal part, he had always appeared under disguises, from which it resulted that he never less resembled his masks than when he was the Simon Pure, indeed, a man who had a good look at him on the highway, would have been unable to point finger at him in the crowd of a town.

Often he had mixed in with a group, and overhead excited conversations in

which he alone was talked of, many a secret laugh he enjoyed at the suppositions he caught of his appearance, manner of living and designs.

After having given as much time to Mokelumne Hill as he had intended, preparations were made to leave it on the first of May.

About midnight—while the horses were being got ready, and the women put on men's clothes, and the rest of the arrangements being completed—Joaquin made a farewell trip into the gambling dens and drinking-houses, which were only too plenty in the rough “days of the discovery.”

He was taking his ease at a monte table, on which he had carelessly cast a small sum to kill time when all of a sudden his attention was attracted from the painted paste-board to a corner, where he heard his name pronounced distinctly. His gaze stopped on four or five men who were warmly, but in a low tone, discussing the doings of the Miners' murderer.

There was one of them, a tall, well-built fellow, a dagger-knife and a revolver of the newest style in his belt, his trousers stuffed into huge cow-hide boots that seemed to tell of the overland route, who was perhaps the loudest-voiced.

“Look a-here boys,” said he, “you all know me as Jack Gabriel, and they all know me up an' down both banks of the Washita from the Lousian' border up. I'm good for three ounces, ain't I? O' course, I am. Well, I'll down with that dust to any one as 'll set me face to face with this —, —, —, (oaths) Joaquin !”

As the words were uttered, the audacious outlaw jumped up on the table sending the different leaves of the “devil's prayer-book” on the tobacco'd floor a leetle promiscuously, and the money along with it, for which half a dozen heads instantly bobbed down—threw his breast open by drawing aside his vest, held a capped revolver, with the hammer set, in his right hand and shouted:

“Keep the stand ! I am Joaquin ! Fire if you dare !”

Notwithstanding the defiance, the young adventurer was not such a fool as not to take advantage of the général confusion that prevailed for the moment.

He pulled his sarape round him quickly, took a grand flying leap from the table—which was smashed under the on-coming boots of Arkansas Jack—and, slipping through the door, jumped upon his horse. There was some delay given his followers from their own haste jamming them in the doorway, and all they could do was jerk up their hands and try a salute of snap shots at the gallopers, but he had the luck to escape a single scratch and the only satisfaction that his enemies received in exchange for their wasted “Dupont's superfine granulated,” was a yell of defiance shrill and prolonged that echoed in the night air.

CHAPTER III.

THE WAGONER GOES UNDER.—A MEETING WITH BILL MILLER.—HARRY LOVE ON THE WAR PATH.—THE “TEJON INJINS” CUT UP ROUGH.

On gaining the trysting-place at Arroyo Cantuva, Joaquin found between three and four hundred horses driven in by his men. The latter were encamped and waiting for fresh instructions. The Chief of the Coyotes selected a part to drive the captures into Sonora for the greater safety, and at the same time had sent one of his secret bankers in the same place five thousand dollars.

About the end of the month, idleness began to grow heavy upon him, and he could bear inaction no longer. He took to the highway again, still accompanied by Gonzales, Felix, Cardoza and the three young women, who formed, as they bestrode their steeds with limbs perhaps too plump and shapely, the prettiest trio of cavaliers that ever cantered into a maid's heart.

For the first ten days, the gang met no persons except unlucky diggers changing off from one mine to another, who were to a man to be smelt of poverty a mile off, they were so redolent of lack of cash. Hence Joaquin's purse remained in so flat a shape that he determined to fall upon the first man, Chinaman or Jew, ex-soldier or ex-sailor, miner or speculator, or even a robber, for the wolf was so famished that it was ready to bite wolf.

Towards dusk, a young man, Allan Ruddell, made his appearance, driving a wagon-load of provisions. Joaquin left his friends, put his horse to the gallop and, taking a short cut, came upon the teamster suddenly.

"I'll trouble you to turn over to me all the cash you've got about you," accosted he.

Ruddell took a squint at the challenger and, seeing a young blade who seemed to be only a novice at the worthy calling of Dick Turpin, Claude Duval and Sixteen-stringed Jack and, in America, Mike Martin, he smiled to himself and "took a fly off" the rump of one of his horses with his heavy rawhide-whip. Joaquin pushed forward along side of him and, drawing his revolver then, commanded in a brutal, peremptory tone:

"Stand, and deliver?"

Ruddell pulled up short.

"Now, see here, my friend," said the young desperado, in a gentler voice, "all I want to do is borrow your money; for, though I am a toll-gatherer on the roads of my own taxes, I never like to relieve of his gold a brave man—and I am sure you are one to travel the roads alone. As true as my name's Joaquin, I will repay you every cent of what you lend me."

"Joaquin, eh?" muttered Ruddell, clapping his hand on the stock of his pistol.

Joaquin made a threatening motion.

"Come, none of your nonsense!" exclaimed he. "I am not often 'shoal on the bar,' and you may rely on my promise. I have no wish to kill you, but if you take to pop-guns, by Our Lady, you'll go toes up most certainly!"

Ruddell was not the man to take a robber's advice when it related to a game two could play at; and he tried to pull out his fire-arm, but the confounded hammer had worked into the lining of his pants and he could not disengage it.

At this moment, Reynards Felix thundered on at a gallop, in order to tell his leader to make haste, as two well-mounted strangers were cunning up at full drive.

"To hell's flames with them!" swore the bandit uncocking his Colt's and stuffing it into its case; at the same time he flashed out his long knife, leaned over and, dealing the wagoner a dreadful stab, fairly tore him from the saddle.

Felix jumped down and turned out Allan's pockets, in which he found the moderate figure of four hundred dollars.

Joaquin and his followers continued their way to meet the new comers. Before five minutes had elapsed the latter came into view.

"Now," said Joaquin, "we'll see what this haul will be. I won't stand any fooling this time."

A prick of the spur made his horse spring forward in advance of his little band. The six holes of his revolver bearing on those approaching were sufficient without the summons accompanying the movement, to prevail on them to draw rein. As the horses reared, one of the riders laughed and said:

"Why hullo, Joaquin, don't you know me? Is Bill Miller dead and under in you mind?"

"By heaven, so it is you," said the Sonorian with a smile; "I swear I didn't know you at first. It's a slapping bit of horseflesh between your legs, Bill!"

"Oh, I'll bet you, yes. You see I've been picking out some good goers in Sacramento Valley. I'm going down into that beautiful Sonora of yours on a

spec in horses. I'm dry as a mountain lake in summer and I've got to raise some 'dough' afore long."

"The deuce you say, Bill? You're a Yank, to be sure, but you've always shown yourself to be a friend of mine. If a hundred will help you along any, ask and here's the chink—its yours."

"Thank you, my boy," said Bill, stowing away the sum, "it's as good a windfall as if one of the Big Trees was blown down. Good luck till next time!"

"Adios, amigo—good bye! luck to you as well," returned the captain of the plunderers. "Don't mind a man and some horses just above on the road."

"What then?"

"The stupid fellow ran against a knife I had in my hand, that's all," added the young leader.

"Hum! that's settled," and off went Miller and his companion their way, while the Mexicans went theirs.

The murder of Allan Ruddell stirred up the embers again. To slay a man for four hundred dollars was held to be "mighty mean."

Now, one of the hot coals that news fanned into flame, was Captain Harry Love, a Pacific State Jack Hays, who got the idea into his head of organizing on his own hook a little company to hunt the bold brigand.

Since he had been able to reach a stirrup from the ground and to hold out a pistol, Harry Love had been in the life of a ranger: his whole existence had passed in braving fatigue and danger. He had rendered Uncle Sam great and many services during the Mexican War, where he had been bearer of dispatches between the military stations, through a country as wild and dangerous as could be naturally, besides being bountifully supplied with guerrillas and independent lancers. A coolness under fire that was unequalled, remarkable skill in handling rifle, six-shooter and bowie, made him the man of all others to be fitted against a desperado of Joaquin's calibre.

After Ruddell's murder, Captain Harry Love set out on the assassin's trail and pursued him to the Rancheria of San Luis de Gonzago, which served as the usual haunt of the coyotes.

He got there after night-fall and, informed by a spy whom he had posted there, that the men he sought were surely in a tent at the other end of the rancheria, he led his men cautiously in that direction.

But, before they arrived at the door, a woman in the next canvas house espied them and gave the alarm. Quicker than thought, Joaquin, Felix, and Gonzalez and Cardoza made a slit in the back of the tent and slipped out and away under cover of the darkness.

When Harry Love and his companions made a dash in through the front opening, they encountered—instead of a volley and a display of daggers—the feigned screams of surprise of four or five females, three of whom were the mistresses of the chiefs of the despoilers. The captain was not aware of this fact, or he might have made hostages of them. He did not deem it well to press on the chase at this juncture and let the thieves go quiet with the scare for this time.

Meanwhile, the escaped four had fled straight as the crow flies to a place eight miles off, called Orris Timbers, where they took their revenge for being made fly in stealing about thirty fine horses, which they drove off into the highlands near at hand.

On the following night, they returned to their light-o'-loves who donned their masculine in all haste, and all turned again to the Sierra. They stayed there until dawn, after which the party crossed Tular Prairie to Los Angelos, driving before them the stolen cattle.

On coming into the country of the Tejon Indians, they encamped on the brink

of a brooklet something less than five miles from the chief village of that tribe.

Everything seemed to promise that there was nothing to fear on the part of those redskins, next to the Pah-Utahs most inoffensive of unromantic, dirty, greasy, grubbing, ignoble children of the forest. So they staked arms, so to say, and resolved for several days to do no other hard work than rest and have their fun.

Now it chanced that one prowling savage, having snuffed roasting meat with his capacious nostrils, crept up to the Mexican camping-ground, remarked their showy raiment, their profusion of jewelry and the valuable horses that grazed around them, and ran off to the capital city and into the royal palace (an old gutta-percha blanket and a piece of sail-cloth stretched on poles) of the old Sagamore Zappatara, to whom he glowingly depicted the wealth of the pale-faces.

One evening as Murieta, Gonzalez, and Felix, far from dreaming of danger, were amusing themselves with their fair but frail companions, and as Cardoza, stretched on the high grass, carelessly kept an eye on the cattle cropping choice tufts of herbage here and there, they were all surrounded and overpowered by a formidable crew of soiled aborigines, whose bonds not exactly of friendship but of unbreakable rawhide, speedily encircled them.

If a dagger had glittered, or a pistol had gone off by accident, or if even a good fist-blow had drawn blood from one son of the woodlands' nose, ten to one the whole party would have whisked round and shot back on the warpath with antelope's speed.

But, inasmuch as nothing of the kind occurred, they were delighted at the unalloyed success of the enterprise, and leaves fell off the oaks at the deafening yell of joy that went up from the throng, dancing, kicking up behind and before, brandishing weapons unpleasantly under the captives' eyes, and almost kissing the lucky brother who had found out the fish and spread the net which had entangled them. Dragged to the headquarters of the valiant tribe, the prisoners were stripped (with an expertness which they, though good judges, might envy) of jewels, arms and clothing, being only permitted to preserve, as offerings of respect to their modesty, several strips of cloth which were utterly useless to the savages.

The Mexicans had the satisfaction of seeing old Zappatara circulate among the ravished squaws in three of their suits, one over the other. The other male garb went to the spy.

The Indians moreover had reaped and gleaned a harvest over and above the horses of four thousand dollars in gold and half that amount in jewels. The lives of the robbers were also in their hands.

For a whole long week, the venerable chieftain kept them prisoners of war, while he puzzled his elevated brain as to whether he should have them made living targets, have them shot, burnt, hanged, drowned, made to run the gauntlet (for which the voice of the women spoke, as their dear little boys hadn't had any sport of late), or what not.

At last, mercifully considering that they must be sufficiently punished for the impudence of having entered his hunting-grounds, he came to another conclusion.

He called a council. And he had translated to the captives a long speech in which, after declaring himself almost ready to wash out in their blood the stain on his tribe put there by his having heard them curse them for "rascally Injins," he spread himself in moral reflections on the enormity and number of the crimes which they must have committed to have become possessed of such a great quantity of gold and jewels.

Then he had them "walked off Spanish" to the confines of his realm, escorted by a detachment of his life-guard armed to the teeth with the knives and firearms late the Mexicans, where they were glad to be let free.

CHAPTER V.

MEETING WITH THE MOUNTAIN JIM.—HARRY LOVE TAKES GONZALEZ AND “BLOCKS THE GAME” OF RESCUE.—MURDER OF CAPTAIN WILSON AND GENERAL BEAN.
—JOE LAKE DOES HIS DUTY AND IS WIPE OUT.

JOAQUIN had borne his durance with the most perfect resignation. He could not help laughing to himself at his ridiculous position and was astonished that the Tejons, not exactly accounted as copper-faced Chevalier Bayards, should have ever had pluck enough to see out an exploit so risky.

After two days' journey, the little company gained the entrance of Tejon Pass, situated a few miles from the San Francisco Ranche. They had the fortune there to meet one of their supporters, Mountain Jim, who—on having heard the story of their adventure—went back to the settlement, from which he brought the vestments of which they stood in need, and besides furnished them with three horses.

One of them, a splendid animal, black without one white hair, elegantly bridled and saddled, was made a present to the chief with a Colt's revolver and a knife. Thus was Joaquin, late a defenceless fugitive, quickly turned into the redoubtable King of Cutthroats, well clad, booted, and armed, by means of the branch resources of the association formed and directed by his genius for plunder.

All being well once more, Joaquin, Felix and Gonzalez mounted, took up their love-lasses on the crupper and went off at full speed in the direction of San Gabriel. Cardoza followed them on foot.

They did not reach that place until far into the night. On entering their place of meeting, an out-of-the-way house, they unexpectedly found Guerra and Valenzuela with their commands.

Returned to Sonora sooner than had been calculated, and not finding their outlaw general at Arroyo Cantuva, they had preferred to try a new expedition of ravaging rather than rust in idleness.

They had committed numerous depredations since their return in the neighborhood of San Gabriel, but they had brought the attention of General Bean upon them and he had so hotly chased them that they had only escaped two or three brushes by superior running.

“That man must die!” said Joaquin. “He has become too dangerous to us, and we will have to rub him out before we pull up stakes hereabouts.”

“Death, death to the general!” was the unanimous cry.

The conversation turned next on the trip to Sonora.

The marauders told their commander that the stock run off had been placed safely on the farm which he had designated.

The gang was abundantly supplied with food, clothes, liquors and cigars, so they made up their minds to spend two or three weeks in this “location.”

In the meantime, Gonzalez and Cardoza were sent on a private mission to the Santa Buenaventura Ranche, which was where the Californian highway chief took refuge in imminent danger.

Several days afterwards, Captain Harry Love, deputy sheriff then of Los Angelos County, who knew Gonzalez by sight, perceived him with Cardoza near Buenaventura, and instantly set to work to secure and him give over to justice.

After having patiently watched them he saw them go into a little grocery or doggery, situated on a cross-path through the mountains. The captain took up his position behind a rock, and kept a steady look-out.

Twenty minutes or so elapsed when Harry, beginning to find the bandits' stay rather long, left his hiding-place and proceeded toward the shanty. At

the moment of his stepping up to it, Cardoza came out, but alone, and took the mountain road.

Love sprang upon him, but the brigand gave him the slip and took to his heels at a fast pace.

A couple of balls whistled after him, one of which furrowed his skull, while the other sent flying into splinters the angle of a boulder which the fugitive leaped around and behind which he vanished.

The captain, who did not greatly hold the capture of Cardoza to heart, turned all his attention thereupon on Gonzalez, whom he knew to be a desperate scoundrel, whereas he could only suspect the fled one on the "birds of a feather flock together" principle. On rushing into the cabin, pistol in hand expecting to have a fierce and bloody tussle, he was astonished to see the thief drunk on the trodden-earth floor.

Half an hour after, by which time he had brought the drunkard around by shaking him and dousing him with water, the two were jogging along over the road to the chief town of the county.

Cardoza saw them from the distance and he lost no time to inform his superior of it.

The latter, followed by Mountain Jim and by the whole of Valenzuela's gang flew in all haste with the intention of surrounding the captor and delivering their entrapped brother. They travelled all night and, at dawn, came at length upon the two.

Gonzalez heard their signal, and responded to it by turning in the saddle and waving his scarf.

Harry, on his side, felt what was the jeopardy in which he was placed riding alone with so dangerous a companion, and, on seeing the latter's appeal which treachery broke all the tacit faith between them, he put a bullet in Gonzalez's heart.

A glance behind showed him a whirling column of dust in which rode a troop of horses as swift as the wind. He gave his steed the spur and rode on at that tearing, break-neck gait which the rangers know how to make a nag take.

A few minutes afterwards, the would-be rescuers pulled up at the spot where the prisoner had fallen; finding him free by death, they yelled with rage and disappointment.

They could not do anything, for—with the start the captain had—the best of Morgan or Eclipse blood could scarcely have overtaken him before he rattled into town with the news of having cleared the roads of one red-handed rover.

On the baffled robbers returning to San Gabriel, Joaquin learned that Three-fingered Jack and his division were at Los Angelos and that Captain Wilson, deputy sheriff of Santa Barbara County, had visited San Gabriel the night before, with the design of seeking the head of the highwayman, whom he had sworn to take dead or alive. In eagerness to see Jack, Joaquin took two of his boldest rogues with him and went down to Los Angelos, where he found his lieutenant.

The latter reported that he had burnt, ten miles out of San Gabriel, a house of which all the people had been massacred one after another as they tried in agony to flee through the flames.

The chief remained several days there in his old asylum.

One evening as he went the rounds to gather the news, he heard that Captain Wilson had put up at the hotel, speaking openly of the resolve he had made to put an end shortly to the criminal career of the young terror of the placers.

The next evening a couple of native miners got into a row in front of that hotel, and a crowd speedily collected to witness the fight.

Like others, Captain Wilson ran down into the street in order to look at the struggle.

A horseman was beside him at the outskirts of the ring, who bent down to say in his ear:

"I am Joaquin!"

Wilson startled, instinctively caught at the horse's reins, but they had been already jerked away, and as he lifted his head a bullet penetrated it, and he fell under the feet of the bystanders, breathing his last.

With a loud re-iteration of his outcry, the Sonorian spurred from the spot.

The quarrel between the Californians had been a trick invented by Jack of the Three Fingers merely to draw Wilson out of the hotel and give his commander an opening for the assassination.

After a short conference with his lieutenants, the leader sent Valenzuela and his men, including Mountain Jim and Cardoza, into San Diego County.

Their orders were to run off all the live-stock (equine) that they could come across and take them to the depot at Arroyo Cantuva.

In the meanwhile, he retraced his steps to San Gabriel with Jack and some others.

At the end of a week or so, Luis Guerra, who had been set to spy the movements of General Bean, saw the latter one evening leaving his dwelling in the town to ride to a piece of property which he owned some miles distant.

Joaquin, the spy, and Three-fingered Jack started personally on the mission and ambushed themselves on the highway about a mile from the general's destination.

When he came abreast of the waylayers, they leaped out altogether on him, and despite a vigorous and gallant defense, the bandits rendered useless the weapons which Bean carried.

Guerra and Jack pulled him out of his saddle, and their master twice buried his knife in the brave heart and stretched the man at his feet; the three-fingered miscreant, to satisfy his brutal instincts, concluded his share in the atrocity by clapping his six-shooter to the corpse's head and emptying half the barrels in the fractured skull.

This awful execution finished, the actors fled to their fellows, with whom they went northerly into Calaveras County, "blazing" their path by a long series of robberies.

The month of August was dying out in '52, when the Scourge of the Golden State set foot in the town of Jackson.

One evening, as he was strolling about unattended, he encountered a young man of the name of Joseph Lake, who had been known by him before he had taken to the road.

They had worked "share and share" in the mines on the Stanislaus, and had been intimate during some time.

After a friendly greeting, the outlaw turned bridle and for several minutes, rode on silently by the others side, boot to boot. At last, gently tapping Lake on the shoulder, he said in a voice a little affected by emotion:

"Joe, there's no use talking. You know what I was, and what I am now-a-days; but, I swear to you before heaven, injustice and tryanny drove me to it!"

So say all such men. He who avenges a wrong on the committer of it, may be pardoned by his fellow man, but there can be no excuse to the person who wars against society, and deals his blows alike at old and young, innocent and guilty.

"I don't ask you to like me and to esteem me now," continued Joaquin, "for you are an honest fellow, but I beg one favor of you, don't betray me to those who do not know my real name and character here."

"Joaquin," answered the other, "it's true that we were hand in hand together in the old days, we were thick as brothers. So we would be still, if you had kept in the honest man's path; but the papers are cancelled to-day and there's too wide a gulch between us."

"You're right there, Joe," said the Sonorian; "but for all that you won't betray me. Though the Americans are my deadly enemies, I love you for the sake of the past, and I'll be d—— sorry to harm you, but I will have to kill you, rest assured, if you speak one word of this meeting of ours."

"Never fear," replied Lake. "No danger of that. But you need not be to free of threats."

Thus they parted.

The chief of the cutthroats took a roundabout way to reach his retreat, while his former friend went on the road which led him to the little hamlet of Ornitas where he lived.

Lake thought over the whole during the night, and came to the conclusion that it was his duty to waken his countrymen to the fact of the dreaded banditti, no doubt being in seclusion so near, and he told of his meeting with Murieta.

Only a few feet from Lake, as he was acquainting his friends with this, was half reclining a Mexican wrapped up in his blanket who seemed to be equally wrapped up in the puffing of his cigarettes, one of which he offered to the American with that charming gracefulness, inborn in the Mexicans, the Spanish and Italians.

About three hours afterwards, a man, whose horse was standing a little way from him, walked up slowly to a party chatting in front of a shop, of which one was Joe Lake.

"Friend, come here a moment, if you please," was the politely-entoned desire coming from the heavy black beard of the stranger.

"Joe, you're wanted," said his friends, pushing him towards the caller.

"Do you know me, Joe?" asked the latter.

"Why, I know you voice, I think, but—"

The false beard fell off the face.

"Ha! you are—"

"Joaquin! you've betrayed me, sir!"

With the words a bullet flew at Lake, and he dropped dead with a shattered skull.

Thanks to the celerity of himself and of his horse, the murderer ran unscathed the gauntlet of shots.

In a few minutes he was descried on top of a hill in the distance, leading away some forty or fifty mounted men.

"The robbers, the robbers!" was the cry of all, to which a shout, made faint by the space between, fiercely if low responded.

CHAPTER VI.

IN CAMP.—A GUERRILLA'S STORY.—THE SLAUGHTER OF CELESTIALS.—THE OLD HAUNT AND NEW RECRUITS.

THE king coyote, uneasy about his acolytes, Valenzuela, Cardoza, and Mountain Jim, and about the results of their doings, directed his steps towards the general rendezvous.

On the following day, they encamped on the high edge of a gully, where, after having kindled a rousing fire, they all commenced an onslaught on sardines and crackers, of which handy comestibles the depredator usually had good store.

In the middle of the meal, Jack of the Three Fingers directed the attention of his comrades towards a little spark of fire which seemed to be a fixed point in the cup of the ravine.

"Holy Mother!" exclaimed the Mexicans. "Who and what can that be?"

"It is in all likelihood the camp-fire of some of the redskins," said Joaquin, letting his eyes listlessly wander towards the indicated site. "As you found it out first, Jack," said he with a smile to the man of the mutilated hand, suppose

you do us the pleasure of scouting a bit thereaway and seeing if a little dust or a nugget or two is not to be had for the asking."

"That's me, Cap," replied the other.

He jumped up on his feet and, after giving his large mouth a dry wipe with his not over-clean jacket sleeve added:

"You'll always find this chap ready for that sort of biz."

"Good! but finish your supper," said the robber chief.

"Oh, no, I'll set sail d'rectly. There's no fear of the sardines growing cold, ha, ha!"

Sticking his revolver and knife into his belt the speaker walked into the brush with the easy step of a man who would not in the least mind whatever might jump up out of the shadows so thick in the underwood.

"Jack's a brave lad," remarked Felix, "he goes into a muss as freely as into a fandango. But he's unluckily an awful lover of bloodshed."

"Oh, there's worse than he," interrupted Guerra, "he ain't half what was old Padre Jurata, whom many of us had for chief in Mexico."

"No, no, certainly not!" chorussed half a dozen.

"He was a regular devil!" went on Guerra. "A downright monster. You remember the way he cleared out the Aparelhos, boys?"

Some did, and some did not remember the said "clearing out," and those who were on the ignoramus side pressed Guerra to tell the story. So applying to a bottle first to wash down the dry cracker-crumbs, the old Mexican freelance began this story, which is only too true.

"Well, you must know that an American sailor long before the war with the confounded heretics of North Americans, cast anchor from cruising in Guaymas. He married a Sonorian girl and very soon afterwards removed up north near the border, up our way. His boys grew up not twenty miles from our house, and we often went hunting together. The old chap was a skinny but very tall fellow, all bones and muscle, which had given him his name, for his real one was unpronounceable to us, these *Smeets* and *Bruns* and *Gohanes* are dreadful barbarous, say, ain't they, compared to our musical ones?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" rose all the voices unanimously.

"Well, Aparelhos, as his boys grew up, two he had I ought to have said as well as a daughter, began to have a reputation for wealth growing up as well. He had huge luck, and he used to work right up to the first heavy fall in the rainy season and begin again the moment the ground was the least dried. These Americans are shockingly industrious, say, mates all?"

"Oh, there's no name for it!" said the bandits groaning at the dreadful depravity of men who wouldn't be idle.

"He used to find gold, sometimes silver, choice pieces of fragrant wood that brought thundering prices at the port and was h— on hitting the animals that had the finest skins. So it went on all well with him, his farm extended, for he bought Ignacio Rosales, Martin Morelos, Fabrino Cartelho out and out, cattle, haciendo and ground. But the war broke out when those gringos said Texas was theirs and not ours and did get it, too. Galveston's five times the size it was a few years ago—just think of the devil's children being so busy!"

All the hands were lifted in pious horror and all the voices groaned a deep "Oh!"

"Just about this time," went on Guerra, "Padre Jurata began to preach and, a lot of us coming together—you, and you, and you, know, eh?"

Half a dozen nodded.

"We formed a neat little guerrilla band and had a lively time skurrying about to pick up such Yankees as were caught in the province, confiscating their goods for the cause. Aparelhos had lived among us so long that none of us recollect that he was one of the heretics. Well, one summer's night—oh, how

well I remember the scene, the horses around, the reverend father tight as a brick, his lieutenant Fra Christino most as far gone, Ramon Ninonentz and me playing cards—Lord! I remember going to play ‘a seven of swords,’ to his ‘nine of lozenges’! Poor fellow, he was thrown out of one of those big two story houses in Sansome street by a Goliah of a yankee who caught him in the room of his girl—girls were scarce in those days—and poor Ramon was stunned and smothered in a mud-puddle. Well, he and me were playing as our sentinels brought a young fellow into camp, his hands tied behind him.

“Here’s ‘Mingo Aparelhos,’ said our men; ‘caught hanging round camp, coyote fashion.’

“‘You lie,’ says he, ‘I was coming to see the reverend father.’

“With that Brother Christino jumped up and says he: ‘Padre Jurata is in a religious ecstasy. What do you want?’

“Now Domingo was a half breed who was the castaway from everybody in the village—heaven knows who his father was, the mother was a poor wretch of a loose Indian-Sonoran who took to the woods when he was born. Evil tongues said Sailor Aparelhos had something to do with the parentage—I don’t believe it myself, and I won’t speak ill of the dead and gone to purgatory. Partly from that and more because he had taken pity on the boy and housed him. The mongrel was half-cracked anyhow.

“While we were questioning him, old Jurata woke up.

“‘What’s the row?’ ‘A prisoner,’ answered Christino. ‘Oh, hang him! But he’s got something to tell us.’ ‘Give him a drink and loosen his tongue.’ ‘But he’s a half-breed son of a heretic and we don’t want to foul our bottles with his satanic lips,’ said the fra who was death on the enemies of the faith. ‘Brother. Half hang him, cut him down, and kick him into a thorn bush, and don’t keep the mezcal *all* to yourself while you’re doing it.’ ‘But he talks of money,’ continued Fra Christino in a loud whisper.

“Jurata jumped up, and only staggered a little. ‘Mother Church, in her holy son here representing, is always ready to receive,’ he began, forgetting he was on the war-path. But a shake from his lieutenant set him to rights.

“‘Well, what brought you here to the camp of the Loyal Lancers and Government Guerrillas of the Province of Sonora,’ challenged our commands to scare him.

“‘I want to be enrolled in your band,’ answered Mingo.

“‘The dev—I mean, the *dev*-out vow I have to keep my ranks pure won’t allow that, my son. You’re the son of a heretic—the offspring of the devil’

“‘No more devil than you,’ cried Domingo, who was very easily set fire. “I’m in love with Donna Manyolina and I told her so this morning. She took me by the throat and locked me up in her room, which I entered, till her brothers and the old man came home. The old wretch whipped me like a dog and the cursed sons, laughing at me all the while, dragged me to the horsepond and chucked me in.’

“‘You do look damp,’ said Jurata, and we all laughed.

“‘I’ve sworn to be avenged,’ went on ‘Mingo, ‘I’ll kill all the Aparelhos, burn their houses, cut their cattle’s throats, pull down the hacienda walls—’

“‘Go on; I don’t see that it’s our business,’ said Jurata, and we burst into laughter again, the mongrel looked so comic yelling out and tossing his arms, which we had unloosed, about.

“But Aparelhos is an American in heart—so are they all,’ screamed Domingo in fury—they are joyous when they hear of the victories of the United States—they were mad and sad when they heard of the Alamo.’

“‘Ha, ha!’ said Fra Christino, ‘we must look into this nest of serpents—’

“‘Silence!’ roared Jurata like a bull; ‘Aparelhos can’t help that. He only talks, not does. He gave a thousand dollars and two silver candlesticks which he got at Guaymas to our chapel, and he gave me that very horse there, for he

said 'twas a shame for a weak priest like me to have to foot it—and it was a shame on the Catholic farmers with their herds of asses, mules and mustangs! And he's always hospitable, and fetches out first-class wines to his guests, if they are unworthy sons of the true faith like humble Padre Jurata!' says our old leader, smacking his lips.

"But I know the secret hiding-place of lots of gold and silver coin—the old man's got ever so much!" howled Domingo, wild at all his entreaties being wasted.

"We all looked at one another," said Guerra, "and then at our reverend Captain. That last thing settled it.

"Ahem!" coughed Jurata. "Well, my good Domingo, out with it. On second thoughts, no traitor to the Republic must be let escape unpunished under mistaken ideas of mercy, no! He is amassing money to aid some grand plot for helping the foe, who can doubt?"

"Of course," cried we all. "Death to the traitor!"

"Give me a horse and anything—a knife even and let me join you," said Domingo.

"You? no impure bloods are going to sully our cause!" answered the padre.

"You refuse, eh?" yelled Domingo. "May the Holy Mother curse you! May her son send lightning on you! may all the saints——"

Down came Padre Jurata's machete on his skull, which it split, and he never moved again. Christino had nearly got his arm taken off in trying to bar the blow.

"Curse him!" he couldn't help swearing, "he's carried the secret of the cache with him."

"So he had. But we, thinking that no one better than we could hunt up gold and valuables, sprang to horse and rattled off to St. Mary of Leon's Butte, on which Aparelhos' house was built. We reached it in half an hour, pretty well scratched from going through the chapparel at such a pace. When we hammered at the big gate, one of the young men came out.

"(The peons, I ought to tell you, were away from the house in their dwelling, and they left for the thicket, when we began to work).

"Who's there?" challenged the son. We told him, when he said we might be d——d, and back he went into the house. They had been reconnoitering from the upper windows, we could see. We surrounded the place, heaping up the brush and lots of torchwood at the gates, which we burnt through. There was a black and a couple of servants in the house who fought for their master, especially after old Aparelhos had blown the brains out of one of them who had tried to jump out of the window. Afraid of fighting at anything but close quarters, for the three Americans, as I call them, were blasted fine shots, we charged in two parties, front and rear. I was in the latter division, which Jurata led. We smashed in a window by exploding a horn of powder at it.

"The first of us who jumped through was cut into four neat quarters by the old rascal's cavalry sword. He nearly stuck the old reverend next, but I pushed Dormeli Pinez at him and he ran him through by mistake. We had a lively flurry in the dark, but no more of us were killed. We had to tumble back out of the window.

"On the other hand, Christino had better luck. He had been beaten back but he brought out with him one of the sons prisoner, and had killed the three men servants as well as the wife. We tried a rush once more, no go. We waited for an hour or two, till we had a lot of wood collected and made a monstrous fire in front, leaving a few to keep a look out there. So under the couple of windows each side. When the flames began to rise and drive the two men, left to our side, we made our third attempt and dragged out them both. The son was dead, the father only stunned with a head wound.

"Then we began to cry out that we wouldn't hurt anybody who surrendered. Out came the camerosta, a luscious slip of a girl—delicious! Donna Mayolina

appeared at the broken window in the light, for half the front of the building was burning merrily now. We called her to come, but her father who had come to life and recovered his voice, spoilt all by shouting:

“No, no! they lie! Join, join your dead mother, murdered by them!”

“We were going to strike him dead for this, but Jurata wouldn’t allow it; one of us did tap him with the flat of his sword, and he swooned again. His son looked on with set teeth and eyes like coals.

“The burning house looked like a skeleton one, with the blaze at the front, and illumined the sky, but none of the far-off neighbors cared to come. Well for ‘em. The heat made us fall back. Suddenly the girl appeared on the upper roof, up which she had to run as up a hill, for it had fallen in at the other end some few feet. God! wasn’t she pretty, handsome, splendid, standing up in that red and yellow brightened air!

“I remember! and I, and I!” said one or two. ‘Guerra’s telling it just as it was!’

“Her hair flying loose in wild disorder, her robe torn and dishevelled, showed her beautiful figure, almost like a marble statue. Such a lovely form as that girl possessed we had never before gazed on.

“Seen too in that brilliant, dazzling light, she looked more like some angel alighting from the skies than a mere mortal girl. I never saw the like.”

The excitable and excited auditors listened, holding their breath and fastening their flashing eyes on Guerra.

“There she stood like a new kind of statue. We could not stir for a moment, when the same idea of saving her impelled half a dozen of us to run into the heated air and hold out a horse blanket. And we shouted above the hissing, crackling, roaring of the accursed flames—

“Jump down, senorita, for the love of God!” interrupted several, those who had been witnesses with Guerra of the scene which he narrated. ‘Yes, yes.’

“Yes, those were the words,” said Guerra. “She hesitated. The tongues of fire darted up behind her higher and thicker than ever. We shouted again. She turned coolly round, and we thought we saw her bright eyes fill with tears which ran down her doubly scorching cheeks, as she looked her last on our prisoners. Her last, for the next moment she sprang into the very core of all that immense bowl of devil’s punch. We thought that the fire danced more merrily than before, anyhow that’s where she ended her life and destroyed all her beauteous form.”

The enthusiastic hearers murmured in Spanish words of pity, such as: “Poor girl—poor maiden. May Our Lady have her!” for they forgot the attending circumstances to place all their interest on the central figure. There was a pause, no one breaking the spell by either eating or drinking. Finally, one spoke up:

“The rest, Guerra. What more?”

“Ah, yes. Well, the brother of the girl, who had been watching her in horror, fell down and we could not awaken him any more than we could his father. They were not dead however. Jurata, who had not forgotten the treasure of which Domingo had said so much, turned sharply on the camerista, and asked her where her master kept his money hidden. She did not know, or would not tell, whichever it was. Jurata gave orders, and off ran Juan Moliti to the stables, from which he brought back a horse’s nose-bag.”

“You won’t tell? very well,” said the padre. ‘Go ahead Juan.’

“Juan collected a couple of handfuls in quantity of the half burnt cinders that were rained down near us, and put them in the bag, which had a bottom too thick to be easily burnt through. Then he tied the bag over the mouth of the girl, after Jurata had asked her again, saying he was sorry to spoil a pretty bird’s singing. The girl could draw a little fresh air through her nose, but her mouth took in the scorching smoke from the bag, of course.

"She began to twist and fight so that four of us could hardly hold her. Her poor little bosom gave a couple of heaves and she worked her limbs so furiously that we let go. She stood reeling for a moment, threw up her arms—the bag falling off—and gave a dreadful cough. Blood poured out of her mouth, and she sank as if a mesquite had fallen upon her.

"Curses she's dead without having spoken!" raged the reverend chief.

"Good!" broke in old Aparelhos, who had come to.

"Who said that?" bellowed Jurata, turning. "Ah, ha! you've found your tongue again. I've been thinking how to make you speak. Will you tell us where you keep your treasure?

"My treas—,"

"Yes, Domingo has let us into the secret of it—at least of the being one. Come, out with it."

"Give one dollar to you, you—you!" and I don't know what he did not call us. "Do your worst, you shan't learn."

Jurata whispered to somebody, Moretos the younger, I believe, but that does not matter," said Guerra, "and he tore the scarf of the dead cameresta into strips, which he wound around every finger of the American's right hand just as if you were going to bind up a broken arm. And he was most securely pinioned.

"Will you tell?"

"I'll see you all in the hell's flames sure to be your portion first;" cried old Aparelhos doggedly.

"Old Father Jurata took the bottle of oil from Moretos, who was our surgeon for the horses and who had been to his saddlebags for it, and poured it on the bound up hand, the cloth on which soaked it up like a cayman in heat drinking a brooklet dry. Then a branch of torchwood was lighted and brought and the hand was set afire! The old heretic stood it for it for a couple of minutes, but then began to howl. But he kept shouting out:

"That's from the agony, God d— you, but (gritting his teeth) I won't speak."

"As his hand burnt up like a big church candle before the shrine of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels, the old American yelled and howled, he cursed us in English, Indian and Spanish, till his son was roused by the noise, and, finding he could not get loose, for he was wound round with a reata, and rawhide may give but it won't break, he called out:

"Father, dear father! Oh, let the old man go and roast me instead."

"Will you tell where the riches are?" asked the Padre.

"He looked at his father.

"No," says the old American, "they'll have their devil's sport anyhow."

"See you skinned first," answered the young fellow.

"Give him a handsome glove," says Jurata laughing, "they're so much alike we had better mate them."

"So the two hands blazed together. I've been hard up on the sands and have had to chew dead mulesteak a little touched and smelling," said Guerra, "but I was sick like the rest, at the damnable stench of that burning flesh. They twisted and groaned, but we could not get one word out of them. We flourished knives and machettes under their eyes and jammed escopette muzzles against their teeth but no use. At last Jurata had them run up to the boughs of a tree, and we with empty hands had to turn our backs on the ruins of the house. Oh, the good old times," ending the ex-guerrilla, sighing. "I don't feel well to think it's all over."

"Maybe our countrymen will give the Yankees a strong taste of the same in this state yet," observed some one.

"Maybe. But here's Jack. And not alone."

The three-fingered freebooter indeed made his appearance, driving before him

eight Chinese, complete in pig-tail, frock, loose breeches and cheap boots. They had been trembling violently enough already, but when they saw themselves in the presence of a large body of armed men, they tumbled down on their knees and begged for mercy in the worst of mixed Spanish and English, but which was extremely expressive from their pitiable tone. Their earnest entreaties, now in full rolling of the almond eyes, and active gestures, only excited the hilarity of the whole band, who made the place ring with unrestrained bursts of merriment.

Jack ordered the Orientals, by means of blended threats and pantomime to change their position from standing, to setting on the rocks a few feet from the fire. This command was executed with prompt obedience, after which Jack flourished his knife over the heads of the line by way of intimation that if they moved an eyebrow or the tips of their queues, he would cut their heads off. He resumed, with as good an appetite as anybody could boast, his meal on the crackers and sardines.

"Mi amigo Jack, my friend," inquired Joaquin, " whence that blood, still fresh I should say, that I see on your dagger's blade?"

"Oh, that spatter there. Why, I had to stick one of these funny Johns to explain my meaning to the rest. As soon as they saw that one of their blessed crowd kissed the ground and stayed there, one of them, turning as reasonable as could be, took the head of the file and the rest trotted along after him like Santa Fe sheep. That's how I made out to fetch them so far."

"Well, now that you've got them, what good are they going to be to anybody?"

"Why, they're too much like sheep not to be bled, the same way."

"You'd better hurry up your cakes, then," said Felix. "They're half way to Mono Lake (the dead sea of California) already."

"Oh, they can wait," returned the semi-cannibal, darting on the captives so significant a look that they began mumbling something to Joss. "I brought them here to amuse the company, but I'm going to fill the barrel of my body with a charge of soda crackers and a wad of sardines before I open the show. I think the Yankees are right in one idea of theirs: 'Business before pleasure.'"

A quarter of an hour elapsed in the consumption of the eatables by the speaker and of tobacco with the others. Then the former sprang up and to the poor Chinese, seven of whom he drew together by their tails and made a new sort of a wheel of them by tying them all together. He grabbed the separate victim by the long braid as well and hauled him backwards and nearly stumbling up to the fire. The bandits jumped up.

"Stop, stop, Jack!" shouted several. "You ain't going to make cracknels of them, blast you? Guerra's been story-telling enough of that without our wanting the real. Don't! a fellow can't keep his supper down with a frying Chinese to look at."

"No, no, I only lugged him here to let the light fall on him."

Out came Jack's knife then, to be plunged up to the buckhorn haft in the heart of the luckless devil. The dying man wrestled with his murderers for a second, when the latter flung him off. The body fell beside the fire, and a thick stream of blood, by the shock, gushed out of the horrible gash and put out the flames.

"Carajo!" swore one Mexican, "you've spotted my jacket!"

"Caramba! maldita! the fire's a goner."

Joaquin stepped up.

"Enough of that, Jack! I won't stand any such wantonness. Kill 'em all at once where they are, and make no bones about it."

"Oh, all right, captain, just as you say, I thought the boys wanted some sport, but I'll have all the fun to myself now."

So saying, he dragged the corpse to one side, let it drop and went over to the shuddering remainder.

Without being in the least moved by their yells, screams, prayers, weeping he stabbed some and cut the throats of others most leisurely.

Before the first one had been butchered, the three women had pulled their blanket-shawls over their heads so as not to behold the horrible affair.

They might have applauded the bull who gored a toreador in a fight, the man who brought down his opponent at sword's points or short pistol-range, but they hated and were disgusted to be tacit accomplices in the slaughter of the unfortunate descendants of the builders of the Great Wall which they were wrong to have passed.

Clarina, who was seated by her lover, overheard him give the order for the despatching of the prisoners; moved by a deep feeling of compassion, she wished to try to shield from cruelty those who yet survived.

Without uncovering her face, she let fall her head on the robber's shoulder, and said in a tremulous voice :

"Oh, Joaquin, why won't you prevent that awful massacre, so useless, of harmless men? Hear their despairing cries! You can—won't you hold back the wretch's hand?"

"My dearly loved girl, that's what I cannot do. Garcia is cruel and violent, and he only linked his fortune to mine to satisfy his dreadful thirst for blood; but he is brave and does not know what danger is, so that it would be a great loss for me to have to part with him."

"Are they beyond hope, poor things, then?" murmured Clarina.

"Yes. I'm sorry in the bottom of my heart for it. Hark! There are only two voices to be heard now—Only one—it dies away with its owner. There, the whole work of blood is ended. They suffer no longer, poor fools for ever having crossed the Pacific."

"By all the saints," ejaculated the bloody-handed murderer, falling on a bunch of grass and his blanket by the rekindled, fire, "if this isn't a red-letter night on my books, shoot me! Those funny dogs resisted just enough to put an edge to it. One fellow scratched me and kicked beau-tiful! Oh, San Miguel, Santa Antonina, let me have another such a treat and I'll walk to Cuba and be joyfully garrotted!"

At daybreak, the party set out again. Notwithstanding the tragedy of the preceding night, all were heart free and gay enough in looking forward to a long quiet stay at their principal retreat. The females especially felt the good effects of the exchange from the terrors of the gloomy eve in the forest, to the serene and brilliant dawn in the more open, sunlit land.

They galloped on lightly beside Joaquin and Felix, a little in advance of the main body, chatting to drive away whatever was troublesome in their minds. Every now and anon they would dart on in a mock-severe chase of a quail, who dropping its proudly-lifted plume on its beak, would skurry along near the ground like a "road-runner" until, rising suddenly, good-bye to anything reaching it but a shot. Clear, silvery peals of laughter rang out on the sonorous air, and snatches of song emulated the birds awakening, while the smiles added fresh charms to the countenances of the young women, and made their eyes sparkle still more brightly.

After several successive halts the band arrived at length at Arroyo Cantuva.

What was the joy of that young prince of pillagers at view of the spectacle extremely grateful to a horse-stealer's eyes, that was visible in the valley.

There were more than a thousand horses, grazing in herbage which brushed their bellies with the high tops or leaping about with floating mane and tail and smoking nostrils through the wild oats and over the clover.

The stallions were already forming their manadas of a few mares unavoidable.

bly taken in the mass, and every little while a vaquero would have to push his horse into the press and lash the horses about to fight.

The whole formed a sort of patchwork; the grass for groundwork and the variegated animals for embroidery, almost all being "calico" or "paint" horses, dun, cream-colored, mouse-colored, black, streaked, speckled, spotted, white, stocking'd and nose'd.

A cluster of tents, white as the snow on Shasta's summit, was glistening under the evergreen madrona. Which proved that the plundering detachment had not only faithfully carried out their instructions, but were on the spot to receive further orders.

The new arrivals raised the well-known shout which signalled their approach, and all made for the canvass camp at headlong speed, where they dismounted.

They were immediately surrounded by Valenzuela, Cardoza and a portion of their followers, of whom the remainder were off on a hunt.

After mutual compliments and felicitations exchanged, the horses were unharnessed and turned into graze with the others.

The riders rolled off on the grass to enjoy the repose so necessary to them.

They had slept as only men can sleep who have gone at the full speed of California steeds, who do not know what pacing or a fast trot or any intermediate pace is, for five hours or so, when they were aroused for supper.

The hunters had returned at nightfall well supplied with game.

A large fire had been made and from it rose the delicious emanations of bear-meat and birds.

Quails and grouse, and a few robins, spitted on twigs stuck in the ground, hissed daintily and sputtered before the embers; on the edge of the heap of coals simmered the contents of large iron camp-kettles full of that herb used oftentimes in the old days of El Dorado for tea; a little further off, on a hundred and more huge leaves were spread out as apologies for cloths on which again set tin plates (bright, though old, for Californian air will not rust things, as other countries), bearing portions of Mexican compounds and such "unconsidered trifles" picked up from ravaged districts as Baltimore pickled oysters, New York lobsters, jellies and fruit.

Apples and pears from the famous San Jose Mission Orchard were side by side with their mates, plucked by Yankee girls in the Bay and the Green Mountain States shipped in a California clipper by the stevedores of the Empire City, and after rounding the awful Cape, rolled out of the side lading-port on San Franciscan shores.

Beside each plate was more or less temptingly set a tin cup, a bundle of cigars or a packet of cigarettes, and a bottle of wine, whose hue as red as the honeybud that a bee might choose to sleep in, glittered alluringly through the transparent prison-walls.

The whole formed a display which no sharp-set marauder would have sneezed at.

On a signal given by the cook: "Pitch in, boys, and never mind us!" the famished crew took up positions as best agreed with their tastes and went to work as if the banquet was a bank of good yielding earth and they so many hydraulic pipes aimed to wash it away. They did wash it down.

The seat of honor was occupied by the Chief of the Coyotes and his Clarina.

On his right hand was Reynardo Felix and his mistress the charming Margarita; to the left Juan Cardoza and the pretty Mariquita.

This latter had for some time worn mourning for her former lover, the Gonzalez so summarily dislodged from his high eminence in the gallery of rogues El Doradian by Captain Harry Love, and had settled her choice on Cardoza.

Her love for gay colors had gained her the nickname of Mariposa (the Butterfly) already, which was confirmed by her thus flitting from the dead flower to the blooming one.

Laughs went up more befitting a Montgomery street negro minstrel hall than a Parisian drawing-room, let us say, but the upper end of the table was more select and the lowered tones there compared to the rougher voices below, was as a cooing of doves to the growling of grizly cubs boxing, dancing and at play together.

Supper was finished, and conversation was rattling on, when the signal arose again.

A score of men dashed up as fast as their jaded beasts could go, Mountain Jim at their head.

Room was made for them. The cooks went to their work once more, and the later comers plied knife and fingers, while receiving the warm congratulations of their comrades.

These recruits were natives of Chili, Peru and Sonora, who had been got together by one of Joaquin's best friends, Fernando Fontes, who had accompanied them to the rallying place.

They brought, as a kind of tribute for their welcome, seventy to seventy-five horses (without their true owners, of course), and Jim announced that two hundred more were corralled in the San Francisco Rancho which would be driven to this retreat during the coming week.

The talk, thus for the time being interrupted, went on again briskly as before, the new-comers being regaled with stories of which the "immoral" was a lesson for their future exploits.

Elegant romancing and incredible yarns succeeded one another, and the whole company would have had to have been credited with greatly thinning out the population if the chronicles of crime were believed in.

In the interludes of hangings, flayings, burnings, shootings and stabbings, one of the girls would sing some melody which from its excesssive sweetness had some effect for the moment on the steel-hearts.

All at once, the general gladness was violently broken into by a quarrel that arose between Three-fingered Jack and Mountain Jim.

The thing was serious enough, as the reader will see.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OUTBREAK.—JACK PUTS HIS FOOT DOWN AND JIM HAS A CLOSE SHAVE.—

FRENCHMEN AND MORE CHINESE.—LOS ANGELOS LYNCHES FELIX, AND HIS GIRL GOES TO JOIN HIM.—JIM AND JACK PART COMPANY.

—BLOOD IN THE MERCED.

THE Mexican had formally laid down a new law of his, thus :

"I'll never let one of these cursed Yankees put foot in the head-quarters here and be let into the secrets of the band!"

On which declaration the rupture between the two aforesaid had resulted.

Mountain Jim, who represented in himself alone the element mentioned, got up on his feet, swallowed his last bite leisurely and replied bluntly :

"That cock won't fight. I'm an American by birth, but I'm Mexican in heart, and you may all be sure that I have all the more interest in upholding the party by the fact that I don't come to you only to be a butcher!"

"If you mean me by that," retorted Garcia, "you lie, and you're a coward if you don't freeze to it!"

At the same time, the robber drew his revolver. To see him rolling his tiger's eyes and frowning with his black brows, like the lightning and thunder on Mont Diablo, and to see his whole face of a devil borne out in its fiendish

promises by his gigantic limbs, it would take a stout heart to look at him twice before in going in opposition to him.

But the other was not a man, as he might have said himself, to be bluffed off with big looks.

At the word "coward" he had grasped his revolver, and he was so quick that he might have had the first shot, but Joaquin had risen and in his sternest, most imperious voice, ordered both of the antagonists to "down with their arms" and have no more brawling.

"That's agreeable," answered the mountain man. "I'm willing to obey my leader's word, though I don't care a dime."

"Stop a bit," muttered Jack. "I ain't no Jackass-rabbit to have long enough ears to hear *all* orders—"

Crack! went his pistol.

But it was one of the new volunteers, who had had the ill luck to be next to Jim, and who had leaped up to fall instantly, mortally wounded. One loud shout broke forth.

As if moved by the same spring, every man was standing, and all the weapons were leveled at or held against the slayer, ready to prevent his ever again disobeying the chief.

"No!" said the latter, stretching out his hand. "Jim—Luis, all, down with the arms!"

The order was obeyed at the word, but all eyes were bent nevertheless on Garcia. He, standing, revolver in hand and finger inside the trigger-ring, eyed his leader with an air of indifference. The silver mounting of the latter's pistol glittered in the rays of the fire as it bore upon the rebel, while, with an angry look and a voice of rage, Joaquin said :

"Jack, you've disobeyed your leader, and have not only rebelled openly but have added the murder of one of your comrades to your misdeed. And the slain man is not only the one with whom you were not concerned but was one who was an utter stranger to you. You have earned death, and I'll show you that I am a better marksman than you."

"Dead shot or not, Joaquin," replied Garcia, dropping his weapon and opening with both hands his shirt to lay bare his breast, "I ain't scared. Blaze away, I'm ready."

As he was defying the shot, a little hand glided round upon the superior's pistol arm, and the sweet voice of Clarina murmured gently in his ear.

"Pardon him, Joaquin, I entreat you."

For a space, the would-be executioner-judge was indecisive, but, at length letting the muzzle of his revolver droop, he said :

"Garcia, I can't bring myself to kill you. You're too fearless to leave the world so, and though your bravery is next door to barbarity because you were born so and cannot master your desires—"

"Yes, yes, he can't help it!" cried at the same time a number of the desperadoes, who, full of admiration at the wretch's coolness, had already forgotten his crime.

The corpse was pitched into a hole somewhere, peace was proclaimed, and the jollity went on more uproariously than ever.

After a night of such revelry, Joaquin despatched Antonio and Guerra, the latter at the head of his division, into the State of Sonora with fifteen hundred head of cattle. He himself turned towards San Luis Obispo, with Valenzuela, Felix, Cardoza, Mountain Jim, Three-fingers and the three women.

On the ensuing day as they were jogging along a rough pathway in the mountains, they caught sight of a couple of French miners who had crept into one cave of the many to eat their breakfast or dinner—whichever it was—under shelter from the sun.

"I'm 'a-thiuking,'" remarked Garcia playing with his dagger, "It would be a good notion to test their pockets."

"Very well, go on," answered the captain, "but remember, no blood spilling."

The next minute the cutthroat was confronting the two men and in a voice of thunder ordering them to "shell out or he'd make sausage-meat out of them."

The blazing eyes of the bandit, the business-like way in which he measured with his steel, and his ferocious mien, spoke clearly enough for the seriousness of his threat.

So the poor Gauls hurriedly unbuckled their chamois-leather belts and transferred them to the robber, who emptied them hastily.

"D—— you for a brace of frog-eating swindlers. Money must be scarce as thunder for you pair to have only forty dollars worth of wire gold a-tween you."

In a moment, he fell upon the unfortunate devils, cut their throats and left them in the cave which became their grave.

The outlaw commander saw them fall bathed in blood from where he and the rest had pulled up to wait, but he contented himself with grumbling and rode on.

As it came on sunset, the party reached a narrow canon on which, stiffened in death, two Chinese and a third not far from the same condition.

Some of the miners, full of the feeling which—years after remaining the same—does not permit the poor Orientals to work near Europeans, had doubtlessly fallen in with them and been their death, for their awful wounds were made by some such blunt-pointed tools as pick-axes.

The one still breathing, though his wound was not mortal in itself, would have certainly expired in a few days from the absence of proper medical assistance.

On seeing the troop pass by, the suffering victim lifted his head and in a weak but affecting accent, and with a look which should have wrung pity from the most stony of hearts, made out to gasp a few words of supplication.

"No use for us to stop," said Joaquin, "the poor devil's in a state past any help that we can give him."

On happening to turn a moment afterwards in his saddle, the speaker perceived Garcia, who had jumped off his horse and run back to the dying man, piercing his already bruised and bleeding breast with his dagger, and after wiping the smeared blade on the now corpse's clothes, cut off the buttons of abelone shell which glittered on the frock. Then springing to horse, he dashed on into his place once more, pocketing the spoil.

"Jack," said the robber king, "that's your cruelty breaking out again. Why, the man would be dead in a couple of days."

"Cruelty," replied the butcher, "I call that coming the friendly over him. I only wanted to shorten his misery—they're splendid abelones, and it's hard to strip a wounded man."

"Shorten his pangs by churning your six inches of steel in him. Not a word more, sir, your heart must be black as Old Nick's."

On arriving at the Mission of San Louis Obispo, Joaquin sent Reynardo to Los Angelos and Mountain Jim and Three-fingered Jack (who were now as thick as could be together) to San Diego, their instructions being to lay hold of all the horses they could and to find out what was said about the assassination of Captain Wilson and General Bean.

About a week elapsed since the departure of the three, when in came Texas Jack, a member of the association of marauders, who brought the news that Reynardo had not a sufficiency of the reynard in him to outwit the people of Los Angelos.

While he had been slumbering after a series of fatiguing fandangoes in a low dance-house, he had been noticed and recognized by an Englishman whom he

had robbed along with other brigands in the neighborhood of Mokelumne Hill.

Arrested on the spot, he was accused of complicity in the murder of General Bcan; although there was not evidence to bring that charge fully upon him, still the attendant proof of his being capable of such an act was shown in the fact being undisputed of his being one of the ravagers under command of Joaquin.

During the few minutes given him to kiss the crucifix, the halter was made ready and he took the leap from life.

So passed Reynardo Felix, without complaint from the honest and peaceable.

His mistress, Margarita, at first refused to believe the intelligence, but Valenzuela, who presently returned from Los Angelos, confirmed it officially.

Thereupon, drawing the silver and steel poignard that she had the habit of carrying in so rude a place as a cutthroat's camp where a little of overplus of liquor might make the men forget discipline to gain a young and pretty women, she plunged it into her bosom before anyone could stay her and died pronouncing her lover's name.

Taking a trip down the shaft to meet Reynardo, was the general opinion attributing the destination of their late partner to quite the opposition to heaven.

This suicide had not been quite forgotten when, to add another testimony to the truth of misfortunes coming Indian file at one another's heels, the three-fingered brave entered the camp to report his mate's decease.

Jack and the latter had stepped off the highway into a tavern a few miles from San Diego, where they were scorching their case-hardened throats with a couple of tumblers of detestable liquor, when a party of Americans, who also entered for their drinks, began to regard them with so suspicious a manner that Jack deemed it prudent to warn Jim that they two had better make themselves scarce.

But the red-eye had had its effect on the mountain-man, and he began to laugh at his comrade and, far from yielding to the advice, went back to the counter for another "something screaming that 'd take the hair off a dead red-head mule." In a few moments more, another four or five Americans rushed hurrying into the doggery to have treats of one of their number who had found "color" extremely rich.

The Mexican no sooner saw this reinforcement which destroyed the faint hope of clearing out the bar-room with a fight, leaped over the doorstep, beckoning his companion to follow.

The latter belched forth a string of oaths with his rummy breath and clung to the counter like a sponge to a rock.

One of the Americans, all of whom had had a talk together, suddenly stepped up to the drinker and laying a clayey hand on his shoulder, said :

"I arrest you for being one of Joaquin's gang!"

Jim tried to strike him; they grappled, and the scuffle began.

Jack outside, perfectly aware how things would be going on and knowing too well that he single-handed could no more cut his way into his friend now than bore through Tejon Peak with a willow rod, contented himself with sending a couple of bullets through the doorway into the bunch of fighters and, clapping spurs to his horse, "got away," as the P. R. says.

Some of the men rushed out of the place, but, mounted as Jack was and well started, they had no chance at all on foot of course. An express-train locomotive could hardly have caught him on such a Bucephalus as he bestrode.

As he rounded the elbow of the road, under the shoulder of the little hill, were some half dozen riders.

They would perhaps have offered to stop a man looking so excited as the new-comer, but he, with presence of mind, shouted "Gay row at McNamara's!

Two bored—I'm after the doctor!" They hesitated, and he was out of pistol-shot before one of them could reflect, and out of rifle-range before one could speak.

In the meantime, the occupants of McNamara's drinking establishment had overpowered Mountain Jim, who was instantly taken to San Diego and hanged without any other delay than the time strictly required to make the hangman's noose at the end of a rope.

A month after these disasters, Joaquin, who had only five companions with him, including the two remaining mistresses of the robbers, undertook a pleasure excursion into Tuolumne County, his only design being to divert Clarina, who had been by the self-murder of her friend Margarita plunged into profound sadness.

They journey slowly but pleasantly and, in a couple of weeks, were treading down the tule-rushes along the River Merced.

There, on the very bank, in the shade of a clump of ancient trees with most luxuriant foliage still, the hanging twigs of the white oaks switching in the wind and the Spanish moss swinging its gray garlands under the knobbed sycamores, the rippling of the stream and the far off grating of a squirrel's teeth against a nut or the tapping of a woodpecker on a nut-pine being the only sound, the party put up their tents, Joaquin having decided to dwell for some time in this peaceful place where nothing seemed likely to intrude to disturb repose.

But if honest folk are not let travel paths of lilies for long, the way of the transgressor is still harder. This pretty determination was destined to be very speedily and abruptly destroyed.

On the following morning, the Sonorian band was awakened by Jack of the Three fingers. Four men in rough coats and high boots, miners evidently, were walking along the other bank of the stream.

"Shall we invite 'em over to have a drink, and drown them?" asked the discoverer with kindling eyes.

"Oh, no. If they are not hunting after us, let them pass on."

While speaking, he peered once more, and more attentively through the slit for loophole which commanded a view of the opposite shore.

"Ha! no! yes, by the saints!" cried he instantly, as a ferocious expression came upon his features. "Come, Jack! Up, up, Cardoza, Valenzuela! Turn out! Follow me——"

Without listening to the entreaties and tears of the women, or explaining, he caught up his revolver and leaped out of the tent, the rest keeping close to his heels.

The travelers were sauntering along tranquilly, without thinking of the least danger when a four-fold detonation rang out, and three of them fell dying or dead in their steps.

The last only slightly wounded, turned round to see from whence had come the shots.

"You d— Yankee—don't you know me—Joaquin!"

Three times he fired, and gave vent to a yell of delight on beholding the man measure his length beside the other fallen. He was slain outright.

"Jack," said he pointing across the water, "I do more than give you permission, I order you to let loose your deviltry. Some of those dogs may live yet—they are at your mercilessness."

At the first words of the chief, Three-fingers had jumped into the Merced, and before the last ones were spoken, he was breasting the current in which he stood up to the neck. In a couple of minutes he had touched bottom again and was soon at his hellish work.

With joy the infernal cutthroat perceived that two of the prostrate men were not only not mortally wounded by were trying to rise, disabled as they were.

One fired, with a trailing, broken arm, one shot at Jack, but the latter unharmed, was instantly trampling on him.

Nor was the enchain'd demon satiated until he had literally embowelled one and torn the reeking heart out of the other.

The second two he kicked into the stream.

Then, on his return, he entered the canvas of the captain, he wanted to know the motive of the latter of hatred and vengeance.

"Jack, answered he, "three of those scoundrels were in the number of the murderers of my poor wife Carmela, and who drove me away from the mines. I don't know the fourth from Adam, but he deserved what he got from being in such bad company."

"He's got all he wants and won't travel with that crowd again, I reckon," said the Mexican, grinning hideously. "I hope, captain, that we come across some more of the fellows who wronged you."

"If we do meet the villains, your steel shan't rust for want of blood. Bah! that's over. Let's quit these diggings and camp somewhere else to-night."

Half an hour afterwards, the whole were galloping Mariposa-wards, near which place, in the rancho of a friend, they took refuge.

CHAPTER VIII.

JACK'S DOINGS.—DROWNS OUT THE ENGLISHMEN.—FLORESCO'S FIRST.—JACK NEARLY GIVES AN EYE TO THE BLIND.—REPAYS THE TEUTONIC SAMARITAN.

DURING the month which the gang spent in the neighborhood of Mariposa, the most of them were idle, but two or three went off and performed little strokes of their plundering.

The insatiable Jack Three-fingers had perpetrated half a dozen robberies accompanied with death-giving in several instances, all alone, when a species of attachment springing up between him and Texas Jack led to both of them undertaking the game together.

One morning as they strolled on the lookout along the valley from which ran some feeders of the Merced, they heard the ringing of picks against stone, the grating of a spade through sand and the scraping of a knife searching for threads of the precious metal in the rocks.

Looking down from the top of the hill whereon the two Jacks were, they could see half a dozen men working for dear life at the damp drained bed of a little rivulet.

They had put up a dam and caught the head waters, which had formed quite a mass by this time, and, not knowing how soon the overflow would happen, were anything but losing time.

"Come on down," said Garcia, "they ought to be making money, and we'll mark if they are worth the whole of us making a call on. We darsent tackle 'em alone eh?"

"God, no. By the Lord, if they ain't every one of 'em, some of the crowd who took poor Valenzuela. I know 'em, muddy as they are. Back, back, I had had a narrow enough escape, then, they'll recognize me, I'll warrant."

"Oh, my eye! rubbish!" growled Jack, falling back under cover nevertheless.

For the moment the pair looked down, undreamt of, upon the workmen. The latter plied their instruments vigorously, their gasps of breath as they labored unweariedly and the short exclamations of "Good bit, this time, Ned! Lend a 'and, 'Arry, to turn this stun hover, bless me hif an 'ell of a chunk hai'n't

hunder hit! Best bit yet, by the bricks of Westminster boys! 'Eave 'arf yer scoopful hinto my bag, Hackney, that black sand's h'all 'pay,' 'ard h'as h'it h'is!"

Every now and then, one or two of them would run up on the bank to the hut, one side of which had had the planks removed to make the "tom" lying like a stranded scow beside it, and deposit there the gatherings.

Garcia ground his teeth an instant but then smiled.

"So they are the set who nailed our comrade, eh? I wonder how much they've made already—no little, I'll bet. Jack, here," and the three-fingered Mexican whispered something to his friend, which made the latter nod approvingly, smile and lift the cord of his powder-horn over his head. Texas carried a rifle this morning and had a double supply of ammunition. At the same time, the other took off his neck-scarf and folded it up into a kind of bag, into which he tipped a quantity of the gunpowder, thus, forming a rude "carcase," as they call it in military mining.

"I'll do it," said Garcia, "for it came into my head first. You might have an eye to any who looks up."

This was the scene.

A kind of tunnel with the upper half removed, something like two hundred feet long and varying in width from thirty at either end to fifty feet in the width parts. In the centre very nearly, the new drained bed hard clay and gravel covered with rocks and a few stumps of trees inbedded beyond possibility of movement, like a groove unevenly broad by some ten to twelve feet and from two yards to three deep. At the upper end of the little ravine, having a fall of twenty feet, the damned up torrent, spread out and leaking gently on the other side to where the two bandits were plotting. This escaped water did not run into its natural course till having reached almost the other end of the valley, thus, though making the grass and ground wet, not at all interfering with the workmen.

A little vegetation which had escaped their hands in making the temporary embankment and this line of earth itself prevented the eyes of any of them below from perceiving Three-fingered Jack who, with the "carcase" in one hand crawled over the moist, sticky and yet slippery soil towards the penned-in water's placid but so potent, sheet insensibly enlarging.

Texas, rifle at the ready, peered through a barrier of cottonwood saplings nearly choked by willows down upon the miners.

The latter, in thus venturing to interfere with nature, had not done so very an imprudent an act as may appear. They had spent the whole of the previous day in fashioning the wall, and had let the night pass in the bed becoming dry, their guard being on the alert to prevent anybody surprising them on seeing their idea and beating them off as might have happened in that lonely place. The breakwater, made for the time being, would have probably lasted all that day, especially with the side-loss relieving its expanding prisoner, and they would make a new one on the morrow, if the "yield" of metal was worth that.

Texas reflected on all this.

"Good thing for the John Bulls," said he approvingly, "baby Jack's going to put a spoke in your wheel."

Meanwhile the Mexican had crept boldly out on the mud wall, and the splashing made by a couple of missteps had made Texas shudder, but not the foe look up. They had all their eyes on the ground, prying about for "indications" of that metal which had lured them from the sea-coast round Torbay, the caves on the Irish Sea, the inland village and the metropolis of millions.

As far from him as he could, did Garcia push the cloth bomb in among the

mass of cut wood, brush, stones and earth. He crept back as far as he could, supported himself on his one hand so as to spring up without delay, held out his other, in which was his revolver and, at the same time that he fired, he jumped up and back, turned in the very air and made a prodigious leap.

At the crack of the firearm, the laborers were not so enwrapped in gold-picking as not to be startled and look up that way. The horror they all felt prevented a sound issuing from them—if they had shouted all together, no matter, for the dull boom would have drowned it as it did all other sounds. The explosion, from being so confined above, did not naturally do the damage concealed in that amount of powder, but was quite as powerful as the author had expected. Not only was the artificial mound split asunder, but the shock acted on the water in some peculiar way—or else the edge of the miniature precipice had been perforated by the element—for, be the cause what it might, a mass of yellowish granite, split downwards and along into a slice like a curtain of a fortress, bearing a crown of mud and loose rocks on its top, leant over and fell into the bed.

One of the miners was struck by the fragments and killed.

Another was thrown off his legs by the shock.

The others thought to fly, but already the enraged confined pond was rushing out in a heavy spout straight at them.

All this in the smallest space of time.

The two robbers, Garcia still panting, for to escape from exploding the mammoth cartridge had been a touch and go matter indeed, could only see the fountain playing its side-long jet forward.

A stream of mingled water, stones, stumps, dirt, first, all of purer water next.

The empty bed was half-filled already with the released prisoner and rushing along to the opening of the valley with great speed, leaping all hindrances in preference to circling around them.

In about ten minutes, the roar died away, the muddy cascade that had formed for a while a murky rainbow, sunk into a paltry stream, pouring quite tranquilly through the opening began by the powder and enlarged by it.

No pond above, but an area of ground plastered down by mud, on which floundered a few reptiles.

"That's done for 'em all, by heavens and their saints!" exclaimed Texas Jack, as he and his colleague stood out on the edge of the chasm to look down.

At the same time, Garcia gave him a vigorous pull back.

Bang! went a large pistol in the hands of one of the miners, who had caught hold of some tree's root on the bank and pulled himself out of the danger at the cost of a bucketful or so of spray and of the filling of his boots with water.

He had remembered the shot that had preceded the louder report and, when on the safe land, had used his eyes more to discover the author of the evil than to look after his no doubt dead comrades.

Hence, when the bandits above came into view, he had kept close, only hastening to re-prime the large horse-pistol which he had not lost from his girdle.

"Hit, Jack?" queried Garcia, emptying two barrels at the man, whom they missed from the distance.

"No, Jack. And you?"

"I'm hunk. Of course, I ain't hit if you're not; he couldn't have had two scattering balls in."

Meanwhile, the survivor had, after a hesitation as to whether he should try to enter the hut, turned to the hills and began climbing with all haste.

On the instant, Garcia was rolling and jumping down the ascent like a big-horn and running along the bank of the rivulet to get a good place to leap across.

Texas Jack took steady aim with his gun, it cracked and spat fire, but the man without a stop, continued his way.

"Missed," yelled Garcia, lifting his revolver.

"Hit!" said Texas.

Indeed, just as the fugitive's foot was pressed upon a jutting crag, he leaned backwards though his head fell forward on his breast, half turned and, completely losing his balance, pitched sideways downwards, shooting along like a limber plank. Garcia had jumped into the water and was at the spot where he fell.

The wounded man said something indistinctly, and died before the Mexican could pierce him with knife or shoot him.

"What did he say?" asked Texas Jack, who had crossed and reached the place as his comrade stripped the corpse of its gold-belt.

"'Merry,' or 'Mary,' I don't know," answered the robber, thrusting his three fingers into the divisions of the wash-leather to feel the quality of the dust and grains. "All I do know is that he came down the hill quicker than he went up."

"It couldn't have been 'merry,' for he was anything but that with my bullet in his backbone," said the Texan.

"What of it? Make haste till we clear out the shanty," and the two ran to the cabin.

They found themselves foiled. The miners had prudently buried what they had gained in previous "exploiting" beyond their ability to carry on their persons, and all that was in the hut was the gatherings of the morning, some few pieces of the "cucumber-seed" size being cleaned, but the rest being still in bits of stone and glittering in conglomerates of sand.

"Curse it!" swore Garcia. "We ought to have known it."

They took what they could quickly. The Texan proposed following the course of let-loose streamlet to find the bodies swept before its first rush, but the other insisted on a return to the camp.

"Garcia," said Joaquin at a private conversation with the man, "have you noticed that new hand Floresco?"

"The milksop, who always speaks against bleeding a sheep after one fleeced it. Yes, captain. Is he a traitor? I thought so—shall I?" and Jack touched his knife meaningly.

"No, no, there's the making of a dare-devil in him, I fancy, but he must be red-handed. I don't suppose he has ever killed a man yet."

"Time he began," said Jack, "there's a boy of fourteen in Jackson who killed two men in a street fight last month."

"As you say. Well, take a stroll. Let Floresco be one of them and make him settle a man."

"All right. "If he don't down he goes."

Off went Jack, and by nightfall he and his trio, including the designated youth, were waiting, chewing the ends of their cigarettes impatiently, for passers along the road out of Mariposa.

It was just the time when a few, and very few wayfarers might be expected. All at once a sound of several horses made their horses prick up their ears, and the masters start up.

Three horse dealers were returning from the mines, and had allied their forces for security, as each carried the proceeds of sales about them.

"There you are, Floresco. Go in!" said Jack, giving his charge a push out of the hedge of scrub spruce.

The young man resolutely planted himself in front of the three riders, displaying his pistol.

"Halt! No passing here till we men of the highway assay your dust."

There was a moment of surprise and perhaps a little fear in the three. But one of them, the middle horseman, who recovered his coolness more quickly than his fellows, jerked a pistol out of his holster.

"Dry up, and step aside, or I'll break your head!" said he.

At this juncture, a chorus of hoarse voices sang out of the bush :

“Joaquin is here! down with your spit-fire, you fools!”

Out jumped the three bandits.

“Drop your belts on the ground, or you’re dead meat!” roared Garcia in a voice which was not his sweetest.

They obeyed, except the centre cavalier, who cocked his pistol.

“Now, Nopal Blossom (Floresco’s nickname), lether up!” cried Garcia. “It’s you or him!”

The young man saw the speaker’s eyes blazing in the dusk like a firebrand blown upon. He nearly touched the man, and fired. The victim, at the start of his horse, fell back and glided off the croup a dead man.

His pistol fell to the ground with him, but the cap had dropped off and the hammer struck the nipple without an explosion following.

“They show fight, eh?” growled Garcia, “don’t leave ‘em a color of metal.”

So the three were completely despoiled, and the robbers retired, well pleased at having gained so much coin as they did, and patting Floresco on the shoulder applaudingly all the way of the return.

For three days the robber of the mutilated hand had been absent from the band, and fear had been excited about him, but no news of accident having arrived to him from justice was to be found in any of the surrounding settlements.

When he did show himself after that time, he was dressed in new clothes somewhat too large for him and had his never very handsome phiz ornamented, for nothing could make it worse, with a dreadful black blood-blister and bruise beside one of his eyes.

This was the story which he told.

He had wandered away from the peopled parts just in mere idleness, and camped in the wilds like the savage he was.

In the night-time while sleeping with his provision-bag as a pillow, something, a stray coyote in all likelihood, had stolen it without his being aware of his loss.

Enraged, he had started on the trail the first thing in the morning, when he had found the tatters of the satchel, but everything it had contained, to the very tobacco, eaten or carried off. This had made him give up his stay in the solitude. Hungry with so much exercise and no breakfast, he had tried to bring down squirrels with pistol-shots, but not one would let him get within range, like the birds.

In the afternoon he had struck a trail of some animal of the deer kind, and he had followed it. As the sun went down, he had perceived small foot-prints running among the large hoof-marks and had recognized them to be made by one or two wolves.

The deer was probably wounded, for its steps were uneven and in many cases it had tumbled over stones and vines instead of leaping them.

This gave Jack hope, and he “loped” on as doggedly as the wolves.

At length the track doubled and turned back on itself, and to the pursuer’s surprise, a crash in the bushes to one side attracting him thither, he saw an antlered body stagger along blindly.

He gave it one shot and was taking up the chase when a couple of growls behind him drew his attention that way.

A pair of red wolves, tongue out and their paws all bleeding and dusty, had stopped on seeing this human barrier to their love of the chase and evinced their disapproval of his smoking revolver.

“You little cusses!” said Jack, and he let the nearer one have a couple of shots, which made it roll over and over in the chinkapin bushes with broken leg and perforated head.

To the man’s surprise, the other did not not scuttle off, tail between legs, as he had taken for granted.

On the contrary, with a "warr-r-r!" deep down in its slimy throat, it fearlessly flew at the bandit, who actually pushed it from him with his revolver.

It was up again in a moment and making its fangs meet in the front of his boot-leg began to tug at it, at the same time as giving full play to its no less sharp claws.

Down went the man on the sugar-pine leaf carpet and the two growled and fought till Garcia, remembering himself, pushed the barrels of his revolver into the belly of the infuriated animal, and kept pulling the trigger (for he had a new patent self-cocking arm) till the remaining loads were all exhausted in a twinkling.

He actually had to hammer with the butt on the entangled teeth to get loose. Then he kicked the dead beast over towards its mate which was howling in the bushes, and indulged in a paeon which was composed of the choicest curses in the English, Spanish, Indian and mining vocabularies.

Loading as he went, the Mexican took up the pursuit once more.

From the extreme wildness of the animal's track, he conjectured that his last shot had seriously injured it.

After a quarter of an hour's run, turning and twisting, a snorting and bleating of pain in a thicket told him where was the prey.

He looked through the natural fence of saplings, which had sprung up into place again after being bent down by the brute.

An elk, larger than he had fancied it when he had seen it in motion, was standing on tremulous legs, its flanks heaving and, at each inflation, fresh blood leaping out of a hole in its flecked skin.

A few twigs dangled on its horns, one of the branches of which had lost its tip.

The nostrils snuffed the air, but the eyes, though open, told the whole story of the poor beast's blundering pace.

It was stone blind from some cause or other, perhaps age, for it was now weaker than a long run would have made it.

While Jack looked, its joints gave way and, first settling down on its haunches the head and breast upheld for a moment as proudly as of old, drooped and, with a choking sob and a roll of the poor sightless orbs, the elk tumbled over on its side.

A rush of steam from its wide nostrils, and no more sound.

"Save powder to drop so, you do!" muttered Jack, pushing into the sort of small clearing.

He returned his revolver to his belt, in exchange for his knife and advanced.

A slight breathing was yet in the prostrate mass, but the wound had clotted itself up and ceased to flow.

Jack boldly grasped the upper branch of horns and bent down to draw his blade across the neck which he tightened.

His relish for leisure butchery was the cause of his mishap.

As if galvanised, the supposed corpse was only too lively. The hoofs struck out furiously and made the sticks and stones fly.

The man, clinging to his hold, felt his arm nearly pulled from the socket and himself jerked upward as the elk staggered to its feet.

Then, Jack saw and felt things as in a dream. His revolver fell out of his belt, his knife left his hand stuck somewhere in the head to which he clung.

A series of plunges, tossings, kickings and short runs terminating in sudden stops, a sensation of being pushed rapidly through the air and of being driven into a mass of half-yielding thorny twigs. And he was senseless.

When he came to consciousness,—he could not tell how long afterwards,—he was in a small rude cabin, pervaded with a smell of cooking, on a blanket on the earthen floor. Over one of his eyes was a large bandage and on one arm was another.

"Hullo!" cried he, sitting up and looking around in amazement, what in the name of the devil is this?"

A man entered the hut while he was wondering. An undeniable German and as undeniably a miner, for his dress and the earth upon it showed that.

"Ah, ha! you bees came aroundt, hein?" said he good humoredly.

"It looks so," answered Jack.

"It looks so, yah, you spicks truth," said the other laughing, as if there were a joke in the response.

To the Mexican's questions he replied in broken English that he was a native of Kreuznachtenberg, heaven knowns exactly where, and that he had come out for a fortune not yet found (added he with peasant's prudence) to the land of gold.

More immediately, he had located himself here all alone, and when out to seek a better place and some eatables in the way of feathered and hairy animals had chanced to strike the elk's trail.

He had followed it for a time without observing the man's steps and, when he did, had kept on hoping to see a fellow being.

He had entered the clearing, where he beheld the carcass of the elk, and a supposed dead man rammed into the bushes. He had shouldered the latter and a piece of the other, and—that was the whole. He was too good a man to expatiate on so simple and natural an act as thus relieving his "brother-man," as he called him.

"You're green," said Jack; "in these diggings or you'd a sliced the man and marched off with the game."

The Samaritan did not perceive the necessity of cruelty, and Jack did not try very hard to convince him.

"You has no tools," remarked the other, "dit you leab your lansmen somewhere?"

"Me? Oh, I was prospecting when I cut after that plaguey deer—burn him!" responded the Mexican.

"Burn him!" ejaculated the other. "I forgottted!" and with that he hurried to the cause of the odor that filled the one chamber, a huge joint of the elk being roasted on a flat stone, which formed the hearth.

Enough that Jack displayed all the winning ways that he could muster and quite conquered the German, that the latter brought out his small keg of liquor and that the two went to bed—blankets, we mean, similarly fuddled.

The German dreamed, as a result of certain words that the Mexican had dropped, that Jack, his partner, guided him to a spot covered with bushes which had to be raked away with a mammoth deer's horns, when a layer of unclayed, unalloyed gold blazed in his eyes, that he returned to his birthplace with the long name, a man far more wealthy than the chief syndic, bought the title and estate of the Count-baron of Hochberg-Johaninsheimerweissbieren, married the girl whom he had last seen knitting at her father's cottage-door, and who had pricked him with a needle in the parting salute.

The robber, on the other hand, awoke instead of revelling in visions, as soon as he slept off the liquor's fumes, considered for a moment, rose noiselessly, felt about for the weapons which he had remarked to be placed in a certain shelf, and knifed without a shade of remorse the man who had saved his life.

This done, still in the dark, he searched the hut, flashed powder to find hiding places, and not poorly paid for his scrutiny, for the industry and steadiness of the Teuton had reaped its fruit for all of his inexperience.

Thus laden with the spoils, as guiltily acquired as could be, he came to the camp to be welcomed as the prodigal son would have been greeted by the spenders of his substance, had he broken his repentance and robbed his father after the feast for his return.

CHAPTER IX.

JACK THIRSTY AGAIN.—THE DRUNKEN MINER.—DARING OF JOAQUIN.

THE misdeeds in the neighborhood of Mariposa had so fluttered the people that it was deemed proper to make a shifting of position. The whole party crossed the Merced at a good ford and, now striking deep into the wooded land, now climbing highlands, directed their route to meet a trail by which they could reach the forks of the Tuohume River, that district where the best and finest gold is obtained throughout the Queen of the Pacific's realm.

Thereupon, as soon as the stream had been passed with the horses, they went on swiftly until near Shaw's Flats.

On all sides rang out a medley of picks, spades, toms, cradles and all the instruments and mechanical assistants that could be brought into use to the miner.

Numbers of Chinese in that quarter, which has been named since "Chinese Camp" for pre-eminence as the Celestial's resort, had pitched their tents on neighboring points, and, working in company, were assiduously working and "clearing up" profitably the refuse of the claims abandoned by others from a "pile" having been made out of it or from disgust at the scanty returns.

The whole scene, animated by the spirit of Labor, glowed with peace, prosperity and contentment.

Joaquin and his followers did not try to avoid general observation.

The state of the country favored him as much as the English and French and German robbers were shielded by the usages of their own times. It was too common a custom for wagoners, horse-dealers, drovers, hunters and travelers of every description, to camp for days and sometimes during whole weeks, on the edge of a water-course, or under the shade of some Big Tree in a lonely valley.

And besides, there was no uneasiness to be excited by the band being well equipped and armed; the habit—widely spread in Californian society of never going even to see your next door neighbor without a "toothpick or a (lead) pea-blower," permitted Captain Joaquin and his cutthroats to flash out their steel in perfect security until they should willingly or perforce reveal their true character.

The commander of this illustrious collection of desperadoes possessing sums more than sufficient for temporary requirements, decided to make some weeks' stay around the Flat.

His chief intention was, while resting and living in an agreeable style, to spend several hundred dollars in circulations in the gambling houses, the saloons and the fandangoes of the vicinity.

Chance served him wonderfully: he found some miners, who—having raised the quantity of wind (otherwise, dust) which answered their expectations and being on the point of going home (great word! in those days, of Californian (y)ore)—were quite willing to dispose of the little cabin which they called their house, along with all the household utensils with which it was not badly supplied.

Situated on a site not very tempting, which the association of diggers had "coyoted" into and worked over and over again until the last precious particle had been removed, the hut was doubly valuable to the new tenants from its being in among the gold-seekers and yet not of them, for there they were not likely to be sought for.

Every evening, the robber leader, accompanied by Cardoza and two girls, would saunter through the growing village for amusement.

The headquarters, during this time, was entrusted to Valenzuela and Garcia, a formal order enjoining the latter to remain peaceable and, under no pretext whatever, to compromise by theft or murder, the asylum of the whole band.

For the first time in his life, the butcher bandit seemed to have lost his hankering for human blood, and, during a period of three weeks, remained near the common resort sharing his time between cards and liquor. In the end, nevertheless, his nature retook the upperhand.

One evening, while Valenzuela was at Sonora along with Joaquin and the others, the wretch whetted his steel and set out in search of a victim.

The Chinese, squatting before their tents, were busy in examining the proceeds of the day's work, sorting and chatting over the "flour" "grain" and "shot" gold, and raising a chorus of thanksgiving to Joss no doubt whenever a five-dollar piece, (common to American miners but extraordinary to them) was displayed.

Jack's eyes caught fire with a savage lustre resembling that of a hunter sighting favorite game. But, as the Americans had tents not very distant, all around the abodes of the sons of the Sun and brothers of the Moon, the bandit, who *only* had the wish to cut off two or three heads and not to get into a fight with a cord in perspective, continued to walk on in the direction of Sonora with the hope of coming up not only to a better place but a more advantageous chance.

On the way, at different times, he encountered parties of miners and raw hands, but as they were armed to the teeth, he let them alone in their bristling array; once in a while a stray Celestial was encountered, but as they were always hanging near to the large parties, he had to overcome his eagerness to spring upon the man and keep his weapons under his blanket.

At the place where the Sonora Road forks and makes an elbow, too, he turned towards Columbia and, when he was only a short distance from that town, sat himself down by the wayside to tranquilly enjoy the flavor of a cigarette.

It was a fine evening, the sky sparkling splendidly.

Jack, before going any farther, resolved to take a little rest and smoke on till two or three in the morning. Then, he thought, on retracing his steps to his chief's cabin, he might, without too much danger, walk in among the Imperial subjects, probably stupefied with opium, and slash half a dozen to death as easily as kiss your hand.

While he was foretasting the pleasure he promised himself in such cold-blooded slaughter, he was interrupted in his reflections by a noise of footsteps, intermingled with the sound of a voice—man's it is hardly necessary to add, for a "live woman at the diggings" was a Barnum'sfeat in the times we write truthfully of—endeavoring to sing fragments of melodies derived rather from the operas of Rice, Christy, Buckley and S. C. Foster than from those of European celebrities.

By listening to the laughable medley which the vocalist produced, it could be guessed instantly that he was like a ship rounding the Horn, half seas over.

Multiplying by the forces concentrated in rifle-whiskey the original powers of the lungs, the stranger, after having manfully "engaged" Zip Coon the Ancient, and Jim Crow, ran on, without a bar or rest, into Possum up a Gum-Tree, Hoop Jamborine and Coal Black Rose. He began next to whistle a combination of Yankee Doodle and Ould Lang Syne; but, not finding his execution of this satisfactory to his Meyerbeerian taste, threw his whole powers into a mingling of songs, yells, and shrill cat-calls.

This new sort of harmony may thus be hinted to the reader (the delicate shades are left to the fancy):

"Oh, ok! Susannah! don't you cry for me,
I'm gwine (hic!) to Cali (hic) forny with—

"hooray! hooraw for hooroo! hip! ki—yi-i i! (Apache charging-cry!) I don't

care a cuss for nothin'. Wagh—a—wagh—a—a (Comanche) th' hundred-an'-one-dol'r nug (hic!) nugget—(Slow scalp-dance chant) hay, yay! Hullo, old boy," added he, trying to pull up short in front of the smoker.

"Go on, go on," said the Mexican, not minding him; "you're drunk all over like the 'paint' on Poor Man's Creek gold."

"Who in h— are—" began the man fiercely, but his ferocity vanishing, he smiled, then scowled, then remembered the only words he had caught of the speech and, hurt at the implied contempt, went on: "Look here, you don't know me—come an' take a nip. I've made a steep lot on the bed-rock—I foun' the hundred an' one nugget in the Dead Man's Canon pocket—I did, I'll bet yer! it's in the papers—Come an' take a—drink or fight's the word—I can lick any man—any smoker—any two smoke—I tell you what, you're mean as earth that ain't pay-durt! You won't? you're a—go to the devil, then!"

And, having found that he must either move or fall, he—without waiting to follow Crockett's to "be sure you're right,"—"went ahead" by zig-zags, uttering a preliminary shout audible for a mile around, to clear his throat and resumed his interesting lay.

He had not gone far from Jack, tacking, backing, and filling, as he did, than the latter, falling upon him unexpectedly, before he had time to change his joyous ballad into a cry of pain, struck him to the earth with a half dozen dagger-blows between the shoulders.

In all haste the murderer rummaged the pockets of the corpse.

After having detached a heavy waist-belt, which contained in coin, dust and some fine half-inch "moccasin" pieces upwards of three thousand dollars, Three-fingers retreated at a run to the cabin, where he flung himself on the bed for repose.

Four or five hours afterwards, in dashed Joaquin and Valenzuela.

The first ran straight up to Jack and, with a violent shake, tore him out of his slumber.

"What's up now?" demanded the latter, at the point of using his weapons.

"A man's body has been found on the highway," was the answer, "and from the number of useless wounds, I believe that he can only have been laid out by you."

"Are you quite sure of it?"

"Yes! so sure that I want no denial of it. But do you know who it is you killed?"

"No. I ain't sure I did kill. He has probably eaten some poison oak leaves for tobacco."

"No nonsense."

"No, in truth," made answer Garcia, assuming an air of mock humility, "and I must say an idea that you might have need of a little funds, and I made that game come down with the dust. I have the honor," concluded he with Mexican gracefulness and politeness, brute as he was, "to present to you the result of my hunt, and a very pleasant heft it has!"

"Very well, Jack," said the chief as he weighed in his hand the money-belt held out to him, "certainly it's a nice round sum, and comes in very handy, for the water was going down on the bar. The trouble of the thing is that, as I have reason to believe, the man who ran against your knife is one of the two miners of whom we bought this shanty. They could not resist having a farewell bender, and they have been spending money furiously all around. The mate of this one, I hear, is at Sonora and ten to one, he will tell about the sale and bring suspicion on us."

"What do you think of doing in that case?" inquired Jack.

¹ "Stay myself here for a day or so, while you and Valenzuela put off hot foot for Stockton. Clarina and Marquita are already on the way with Cardoza, and you will probaby catch up to them before they get to the town."

"And he had best start at once, both of us as you say," said Valenzuela "To horse!"

In a few minutes, the steeds were saddled and bitted.

Jack and the last speaker galloped off at the designated direction, and their leader rode away slowly towards Sonora.

The dawn was breaking, and the gaming-hells were being choked up already with blacklegs and outsiders, all conversing animatedly about the Last Horrid Murder, and expressing great unanimity on only wishing they had the assassin in their power to lynch him.

Joaquin dismounted and tranquilly strode into a saloon for play, his cloak arranged in the Mexican style.

He gave a nod to those of his countrymen whom he knew, took a stool and seated himself in a corner of the place not far from the door.

There was a deal of stress laid on the brutality of the murderer, who seemed to have found devilish delight in inflicting gash upon gash on the victim, although any one of them almost would have been mortal.

This remark set everybody to swearing most energetically that they would turn every stone to get hold of the guilty.

"Blast me, with poor powder too," said one in the principal crowd, as he banged the counter with a not delicate fist, "if I'd be one bit astonished if them greasers had a hand in our friend's going under."

"What greasers?" asked some one.

"Why, them bloody Mexicans, of course, who bought out the river claim. Why did they buy it? I don't know and don't want to guess. But there's one d— sure thing, that they haven't done one hour's streak of work. Riding around like circus-men in the States, playing monte all day long like reg'lar professionals, singing, laughing, chinking full and heaping over—that's their style of living since they have kept house in this location."

"That's so, if it ain't may I never lift pick agin' or see t'other side the Is'mus!" said a third, as tall and slender as the first was stumpy and thickset. "By George, it's the truth! no one can say where them Mexicans of the deuce rake in the dough. Their pockets don't dry up, anyhow!"

"Swallow me up in a sand-storm!" thundered the first who had spoken; "just give a squint over yonder, Johnny! May I never cross the plains agin, if there ain't one of that Satan's own crowd squatting before us as cool as a eowcumber in a jar of vinegar!"

He levelled his finger at Joaquin.

"It is one of 'em, as true as you live! If he understood English, he'd be shivering in his yellow skin—by all the blue blazers, I'll go take his hide—see!"

Joaquin had not lost one word of the above elegant conversation. Yet he had dwelt unaffected until the end, and all he did was smile and rise with the utmost willingness when the man strode over to him and laid his heavy hand upon his shoulder, saying:

"I'm a-thinking you're caught at last, my old boy."

The captive, before the smile had quitted his lips, had drawn his revolver, reversed it and dealt his captor a most vigorous and swinging blow, at which, with dented temple, the American fell his whole length on the "puncheon" floor.

With a wild cat's leap, the chief of the bandits was out of the saloon, and in a second more the clatter of horse's hoofs resounded without on the way to Stockton.

The Californian Claude Duval was once more free.

CHAPTER X.

GLITTERING BAIT. — AMBUSH AT SAN ANDREAS. — CARDOZA IS QUIT WITH MARQUITA. — “DOCTOR” JACK AND THE SICK MAN. — HOW TWO OF THE GALLows-BIRDS WENT TO ROOST.

ONE day was all that was required by the escaped highwayman to overtake his comrades, whom he found at table in a Chicago frame house called a tavern, half a dozen miles out of the town named after the Commodore of so much service to the state and the Union. He acquainted them in a few words what he had been doing, and, on that, all jumped into saddle again. Another hour sufficed to bring them to the end of their journey.

On the following day, just after sundown, Joaquin, Valenzuela and the three-fingered miscreant, as they strolled along the levee, suddenly had their gaze attracted by three American miners who were making that immense display which has vulgarly received the title of “splurge.”

They were dressed in new suits of dark green, of which they had replaced the buttons by good sized pepites or pieces of scale-gold.

One wore on his breast, like a European order, a prong of a sluice-fork, the whole tine of which was heavily gilt; another was similarly decorated with a cradle-spoon, covered as well with the precious ore.

The third, except his glazed cap had a nice little lump of some fifty or sixty dollars worth of metal over its peak, was unlike the others as to carrying trophies of the trade.

They strutted with an air which proved that they were out merely to exhibit themselves.

“A pretty set,” remarked the chief, “they seem to be a least bit vain.”

“I should say so,” said Valenzuela, “and if it is founded on a solid base they ought to be owners of a little of the ore.”

“I was just thinking the same,” chimed in Gareia, instinctively feeling for his knife; “they’ll have to have a six-inch steel shaft sunk into ‘em.”

As he concluded his threat, the three cynosures stalked into an eating-house. Joaquin, ordering his followers to await his return, no sooner saw them disappear, then he darted after them.

He entered the saloon and sat down at a table not far from the Americans.

In less than ten minutes, while trifling with a cup of a queer decoction dignified by the name of coffee and charged just as much for, he gathered all the information of which he stood in need.

Rejoining his satellites, he turned back with them on the way to the house in which they had temporarily installed themselves in the Mexican quarter of the town, and, as soon as the horses were baited, off to San Andreas.

When four miles from Stockton, they pulled up, hid the horses in the chaparal, and themselves in the brush near the roadside.

“Our men will be here very soon,” remarked the captain. “On the eve of taking the back trail to their native land with the fortune which they boast of having amassed here, they talk of starting for San Francisco to-morrow. Another ought to have joined them at Stockton at three o’clock to-day, but, as he hadn’t turned up, they are returning to San Andreas to find him.”

“A regular windfall for us,” said Valenzuela, “it oils the wheel for our idea.”

“Hark! I think I hear them,” growled Three-fingered Jack, as he thrust his head through the bushes.

“Indeed, here they come,” agreed Joaquin. “Wait till they’re fairly abreast of us and then, boys, upset the cabaleros.”

The three miners, at a gentle gallop, were approaching.

They could be heard dilating openly on the prospect of the old scenes again and their "sure thing" on marriages, and so forth.

How they were going to make the money fly, how they would stand treat for years at Eastern village-taverns, how they would buy a house for this friend of theirs, how they'd half-kill some enemy and buy off justice. They chatted of their luck at the placers, and laughed to think of the envy felt by their fellow-workmen at their sudden departure.

And they so sang, so laughed, and told such joyous stories that it proved that no foreboding was putting them on the alert against the ambuscade of evil. Hardly had they come up to the place where lay the banditti in wait than the latter, springing up from the concealment like partridges on a "rise" from the tall grass, grasped the reins of the horses, and, before the unfortunate miners had time to overcome the surprise, a volley at point-blank blew out their brains and emptied their saddles.

The corpses were carefully stripped and dragged off into a thicket.

Altogether, the three yielded nearly eight thousand dollars in gold, dust and grain.

This profitable waylaying over, the chief and Jack Three fingers started off in search of a new refuge, while Valenzuela returned towards Stockton to escort the two women and Cardoza.

That same evening, the whole party came together once more, on the way into El Dorado County. They crossed part of Sacramento County and encamped on the south fork of American River.

In a few days, they were joined by Hernando Fontes and his cluster of rogue-grapes, one of the number of which, while scouting among the fringe of tules, had espied the leader and his followers and hastened to inform his superior.

Fontes had been charged with collecting all the horses he could run off and, from different districts, he had already driven close upon four hundred to the main rendezvous.

He told Joaquin, that Antonio and Guerra had returned from Sonora to the Arroyo, each bringing a new mistress.

The captain was well satisfied with the intelligence.

For an instant, he was on the point of departing with all his gang to the headquarters, so impatient was he to learn the details of his lieutenant's enterprises and to see the new señoritas, but private affairs of much higher importance decided him to defer for sometime the pleasure he proposed to himself. Profiting, however, by the occasion presenting itself, he made Clarina and Mariquita go to the Arroyo, entrusting them to the guard of Cardoza, Fernando and of a couple of other Mexicans.

In this way, he gave them rest from their fatigues, at the same time that he shielded them from the perils to which he and his might yet be exposed before they, too, could reach the asylum.

The two young women had hardly left the camp with their guard, than a dispute arose between Mariquita and her lover.

The former asserted very plainly that the latter was not to be compared to her preceeding flame Gonzalez as regarded affection for her, and declared that she would not have anything to do with him thereafter.

Cardoza, finding that he suffered shameful defeat in a war of words with her, cut a dainty little switch from the hedge and used it up, bark, inner peel, wood and pith, to a few inches upon the rebel's shoulders.

The latter submitted to all appearance, with resignation most full and humble; but she was really revolving plans of revenge.

On the following day, as they both were ascending slowly a pathway which wound among the peaks and crags of a very steep sierra, the vindictive Mari-

quita seized the opportunity when they were on the brink of a precipice more than a hundred and twenty-five feet deep and, plucking her tiny but sharp dagger from her bosom, buried its needle-like blade over her lover's shoulder in his heart.

Cardoza uttered a low moan, and tried to turn around, but, as he attempted this, his horse reared, slipped and toppled over.

Down they went, rider and steed, to the bottom. Mariquita had so dexterously and quickly executed her project that nobody at all had been witness of it.

By the time the rest came up, she had restored the weapon to its place.

She went so far even as to pour out a profusion of tears, very bitter, seemingly, over the loss.

It may be that they were the work of remorse.

But in any event, her grief was not of long duration. The trysting-place had been no sooner attained, than, her gaiety returning, the merry murderer had accepted as third gallant a young fellow named Manuel Sevalio.

Two days afterwards, Joaquin heard of the accident that was said to have befallen one of his command. Fernando having despatched one of his men to carry the tidings, and thought it strange that so good a cavalier had had this happen to him.

It seemed impossible that any failure on his part had led to the catastrophe.

With a dozen of his bandits, he went with them to the place to ferret out the facts and to bury the victim.

They used a different road to that taken by the former party and descended to where lay the cavalier and his horse.

The corpse was closely examined, but it had been so cut by the points of rocks below that the puncture of the poignard was perfectly past perception. After having carefully removed all the arms and valuables upon the body, the robbers tumbled it into a hole in the sand and left him alone in his homicidal and felonious glory.

At the end of another week, Joaquin, accompanied by Three-fingered Jack, Valenzuela and Fernando's troop, in all six-and-twenty proved rascals, took to the road to recommence depredations in El Dorado County, as well as in the neighboring one of Calaveras.

On coming near Mud springs, an isolated hut on the hillside drew their gaze to it.

Believing it to be unoccupied and seeing at first glance that it was an excellent place in which to spend the night, Jack clapped spurs to his horse, rushed up the plane, jumped off in front of the hut and, throwing open the door, walked in unceremoniously.

Contrary to the idea that had sprung up, the dwelling was occupied.

The tenant was a foreigner who was kept to his bed by some serious ailment, and thus gave to the surroundings all that appearance of abandonment and loneliness which had deceived the gentlemen of the highway.

"Hullo! sick man!" exclaimed Jack, seeing the couched person move.

"Pour l'amour de—love of God, a doct—" murmured the low, weak voice most supplicatingly.

"I'm a doctor," replied Jack, disengaging his knife. "Kill or cure is my motto!"

And he drew his steel across the sick man's wasted, yellow throat.

Two or three of his comrades lent a hand and they carried the body outside and tossed it into a near-at-hand ravine.

Thereupon the gang took possession of the hovel, which they found to be not poorly supplied with all kinds of provisions, blankets, mining implements, pipes and, of course, a fair stock of the Virginian weed.

Operations were commenced on the latter by making up a lot of it into cigarettes which kept them smoking for a couple of hours; then they spread out

their blankets, wrapped themselves up and dropped off quietly into slumber.

As the Aurora, with her sunny pencil, began laying the colors on the early sky, the commanding bandit sent off three men to the Mud Springs Camp to procure coffee and butter and whatever else was required by the dainty appetites of his freebooters.

In about two hours, one of them came back, not only alone but empty-handed.

"Where are the rest of you?" inquired the chief.

"Dead!" answered the man.

"Dead—how?"

The returned one drew his finger around his neck and then lifted himself by the ear.

"Hanged?" asked all.

"Hung like beef. Yes, captain and comrades mine. Hardly had we set foot in the cursed settlement, and had they two went into a grocery to buy, while I stopped at a bar for my eye-opener, talking to the owner of the posade who was a Mexican, than I heard a h— of a row outside. I looked. Four or five Yankees had hold of my mates, covering them with bowies and six-shooters. One, with dreadful loud lungs, was shouting that he recognized Sebastiano el Carpintero for a horse-thief, who had even run off not a few head from his own ranche in Sacramento Valley, in eighteen-fifty, and, after being trapped had broken prison.

And he went on to cry in that same loud voice, that his partner must be one of the same tribe or else he wouldn't be along with him. Just as if that proved anything," remarked the bandit; "why, I've been with honest men often and I—"

"Never was mistaken for one," said Garcia.

"Jes' so. However, there was no getting the best of the crowd that that noisy brute scared up. While they hauled up my mates to an ugly tree, I slipped through the back window of the bar and quit."

"A confoundedly provoking story," said Joaquin. "We must leave this forthwith. If it weren't for the fact that I want to do something more important, with my men, we would go down into the Springs and lay waste the whole paltry camp. But the Yankees may hold their horses, they shan't lose anything by not getting their dose right away. To horse, boys, and away."

In a trice, the pirates of the placers were mounted and pushing their horses on at such a pace as the pony-express man may take when the redskins are after the mail. At first, good care was taken not to describe a straight line; by zigzags and detours they moved, and after making many stoppages at various places, sometimes to despoil a traveler and at others to bait the steeds, the band drew rein on an eminence of sad and gloomy aspect about a mile from Salmon Falls.

There they passed the night.

The spot seemed to have been formed expressly by nature for the use to which they put it.

Almost entirely concealed by the rocks all around, the wall having its gaps and chinks filled up thickly with inextricably woven briars, there was a central clearing of twenty feet or so in diameter, which was the most comfortable and safe of all robbers' retreats.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STORY OF THE DESPERADO CHIEF.—RUNNING THE GAUNTLET.—THE MAN HUNTERS COME TO GRIEF.—THE GERMANS TRICKED.

AFTER the necessary care had been taken of the horses, native-bred ones that can beat any in the world for a long journey at full speed, the party proceeded to attend to the comestibles which had been obtained during the day, after which meal, the cigars had their turn.

“My lads,” said Valenzuela, “a fellow hears nothing but hangings now-a-days. It is fatiguing, *muchacos*. The Yankees are a mean-spirited set to never let a man die unless in the air. We Mexicans at least half the time prefer to give less elevated deaths.”

“Your'e right there,” said Carillo; “hanging is a poor idea. But the Americans will believe in it; they're brought up to it from their birth. Listen to them and you'll hear them swear ‘hang it!’ they ‘hang out’ instead of live; ‘hang’ round bars instead of ‘bumming’; have pistols that don’t ‘hang’ fire as often as I wish, and so they go on. They must either hang or be hanged that's a fact. But, look here, seeing we may not be able to keep them from stringing our friends up, what prevents us swinging in the breeze every one of them we catch?”

“Bah!” growled three-fingered Jack, “it's a poor system! When I kill any one, I want to see the ‘color’ of his blood. Carajo, dry up with your executioner's talk. Let them rope as they please—I stick to steel and lead!”

“Comrades,” said Joaquin, “more than any one amongst you have I suffered by the passion of the Yankees for hanging people, for I saw my own brother strangled. He never had done any harm. It was at a time when I could neither save him or punish the wrong-doers; but since I have taken my revenge and I continue to seek it. But a truce to such sad topics. Let me relate to you an adventure that happened to me not long ago in Tuolumne County.”

“Yes, yes! hooray for the captain's story!” exclaimed all voices. “Silence!”

“I was entering upon the pursuit we gentlemen of the highway have the honor to carry on at the present speaking,” began the bandit leader. “I went into Tuolumne County with my followers, amounting to the not very powerful array of seven all told, to the little camp of San Diego, half a mile about from Columbia, you know, which I found to be a place suiting us for many reasons. During daylight, we kept busy at work killing and plundering the diggers, whether we met them in small sets roaming about for placers, or mining in solitary spots after a good result to their prospecting. When the sun went down, we would go and leave in the hells of the town part or all of the money thus made by marauding.

“As a matter of course, in paying these visits to the monte's quicksands that swallow up one's funds so fast, I had to change dresses every time almost so as not to be known but to be thought in every new saloon a stranger. Among those who had seen enough of me in other days to have recognised me was one constable of the name of Leary, whom I especially took heed to steer clear from for fear that he would dive under my disguise and force me to stand on the defensive. Besides, he was about the only man in the whole once blessed State at whom I hated to level my revolver, for he had never treated me otherwise than with the utmost courtesy and friendship. As I knew that he was fully posted on my goings-on and as I thought that—being a sworn officer and a man of honor as well—he would employ all his skill, courage and energy to make sure of my arrest and punishment, I was determined, as I say, to never cross his path.

“Now, one evening, it came to pass that I neglected a part of my disguise

which I was in the habit of wearing: my false beard was bothersome, and I believed that I could manage well enough to hide my face in my cloak. On coming out of a certain gambling-house at midnight, I took great pains, indeed, to muffle up my head in the folds. As ill luck would have it, just as I stood on the threshold, Leary came along and went in, giving me a very sharp look as he jostled me. I pretended to notice him in no way; but, the moment I touched the street, I set off at a run through the dark and reached our rallying place.

"Day had not dawned that morning, before I—being on the lookout, for I always look to my companions' safety before my own—dcn't I, boys!"

"Yes, yes! you're a glorious captain," cried all.

Joaquin bowed thanks.

"Just at day break then, I saw suddenly shoot up into sight a number of men coming on quickly towards our tent, led by Leary. You may bet that I had no trouble to guess what they were after. I woke up my slumbering men and all of us, understanding that to fly was the only course, slipped out and dashed down the road with all the speed we had. A volley whistled by us, but did no harm. They followed and cut off three of us, but they—gallant fellows!—though I feared that they were never to cry 'Stand' again—fought as fiercely as a cub-robbed grizzly, and regained their freedom, not the least hurt. I alone was wounded, Leary shot me in the shoulder at the last fire, as they gave up the chase.

"We were both on foot, you must know, which was what helped our flight, so greatly, for we were lighter men than the big-boned six-foot Americans, and travelled the narrow pathways in the grey light far swifter than they. So we threw Mr. Leary off our trail, and found a new retreat which defied discovery. That was the first time that I was pursued, hunted by the enemy; but, if I had had the good luck to have counted several more helping hands, I vow to you that I would not have yielded an inch."

"Bravo!" cried the auditors, whose voices united to propose a toast to their leader's health.

On the following day, the bandits encountered one of their countrymen who was driving between forty and fifty mules, all laden with bales of provisions. They purchased of him a large quantity of flour, coffee, sugar, frijoles and other articles, and continued their march until they had gained the end of a lonely prairie, well covered with trees, under one of which they camped.

The understanding was that they would remain there a week or ten days to give the animals time to recover strength and the men freedom to rest and amuse themselves.

At the place where begins the south branch of the Mokelumne River, in a deserted tract, not far from the boundary line of the Counties of Calaveras and El Dorado, was established a mining company composed of five-and-twenty.

Being out prospecting one day, well armed of course, they had chanced upon this site, and, discovering indications of rich deposits, they had hastened to pitch their canvas house there, well satisfied with a spot which had merely the one disadvantage of being far away from dwellings.

One morning, as they were finishing the hearty breakfast of smoked beef, salt pork and ship's bread, a young man on horseback came along, stopped and addressed them.

He was chiefly remarkable for very fine black hair and eyes.

He spoke English so perfectly that, though he looked like a Mexican or a native Californian, he might have been a man of the States under Mason and Dixon's line.

They heartily pressed him to dismount and take a bite, or a pull at a brandy bottle, but he politely refused.

He threw one leg over his horse's neck, however, and sat something like a lady on a side-saddle, and, finding himself at his ease by that means, he chatted freely on different matters more or less relative to the one topic of the day, gold, until he saw one of the miners, who had gone to a spring to get some unmuddled drinking water, return.

"Jim Boyce," muttered he on his first glance.

He threw his leg into place again, shook himself into the saddle and gave his horse both spurs.

Boyce had already shouted :

"That's Joaquin the robber, boys! Quick, quick, fire!"

While he cried, he shot with his own revolver at the discovered chief. But uselessly.

The latter had directed his horse at hazard straight up on the bit of level land thinking to ride along it and off down the end.

But passage that way he found abruptly cut off by the perpendicular descent of the rocks.

The only route left, a scarcely practicable one, was a narrow path which ran along the face of a high hill for fully a hundred yards.

The rocks over which it went, overhanging the stream on the other side, were in the same line as the hill on which the miners had encamped and not thirty yards off.

To venture upon such an apology for a riding path was a rough act for any man, even a Gaucho of the Pampas, a hunter of the prairies, an English rough-rider or a "Kit Carson" to attempt.

Not only was there the danger of having a fall from the top of the rocks one hundred feet, but it was a line of no less than a hundred or a hundred and fifty yards on which he had to move within range of the large-sized revolvers which the miners carried, no toy pop-guns, mind you, but ones which "hit to kill."

Under the very eyes of Joaquin, as, after wheeling, he had to retrace his steps, stood the whole company. As if he were a spectral rider on a phantom steed, however, he flew along the perilous path, casting these words at the marksmen as he passed :

"I am Joaquin! Kill, if you can!"

At the same moment, as a platoon responds to the officer's words, the five-and-twenty pieces cracked in a dropping fire, but most of the bullets, with that fault which generally spares a man, went too high and flattened on the stone beside him, and now behind him.

His sombrero, nevertheless, struck in crown and brim by three bullets and a fourth composed of two that had "wedded" themselves in the flight, strange as that may seem, flew off, flapping its torn pieces like a wounded bird, and sailed downwards after a circling sweep.

His long black hair floated in the breeze his swift rush caused, like a continuation of the horse's mane.

Time was too precious for him to dream of returning fire, and he felt but too plainly that safety lay only in speed.

All he did, Spaniard like, was to whip out his dagger and flourish it over his bare head in contempt.

The arms spat fire and lead once more, but a loud shout replied through the woods very soon after. The Pirate of the Placers, laughing at the broadside, was sailing away on his equine clipper to the harbor of his crew.

Now Joaquin was acquainted with Mr. Jim Boyce, and he was aware of the latter possessing a determined character which it was hard to shake from any resolve which it might form. It was probable that he would do something towards checking the exploits of the brigand.

Besides, there was a likelihood of his having some knowledge of the different rewards offered here and there to anybody who should take or slay the marauders' chief; and, rich as was the placer which his friends were working, they might, for the money down of the rewards, "take one shy" at the capture, for they could leave enough of their association on the spot to secure claims.

Miners' Law runs that, leave your grounds for the smallest space of time and John a-Nokes or John a-Stiles, first passer-by, may stick in his pick and say: "These diggings are mine—'ware! hands off, whether you please or no."

A risk was run therefore by the plunderers by remaining any longer in the present halting-place, which was hardly three miles from the American mines.

Certain, though, that the foe could hardly be afoot before the day's end, that time being fully demanded for getting together of horses and provender, as well as preparation of weapons and munitions, Joaquin conceived one of those ideas, the like of which he had no doubt heard of having often been carried out all along the Texas border, in the Staked Plains, the Great American Desert, the head-waters of the Gila and Red Rivers, and the Cross Timbers.

His design was, while effectually reducing to nothing whatever projects the pursuers might combine, to make the hunted ones master of their chasers' wealth.

Knowing that there is no reason that a trail cannot be laid during the dark, but sure that—until gas shall be introduced into the wilderness—it is impossible to follow it under such circumstances, he ordered his men to truss up the girths of the horses and be ready to journey on again.

Not a question was put of course, to the leader at so seemingly unwarranted a command, but by a few minutes, all were ready, toe in the box-stirrups, reins in hand.

Joaquin put himself at the head, and, in the deepest stillness, the cavalcade struck due east through the long avenues of sugar-pines vaulted over head with bluish green foliage. The pace was a rapid one at which they went until night-fall, by which period they had got over twenty miles. They pressed on as long as they could see, and at length halted.

Fires were built of boughs, pulled down by lassoes, to keep off wild beasts, for in the woods, the smell of cooking was likely to attract them.

The horses were tied up as customary, and the men not on duty rolled themselves up in their zarapes.

The watchers charged to attend to the security of the camp, relieved one another every half hour until sunrise, the spells of guard being so short to make each sentry the sharper.

At the first peep, all were aroused and to horse once more, five hours had been the time given to repose.

Until noon, the ground was got over with the same celerity as on the previous evening. They were in the cup of a most enchanting valley, carpeted, as Nature delights to do in the Golden Paradise, with richest flowers, changing hues and species month after month.

It was watered by a limpid brooklet which, sweetly singing, stole a path through the roots of a clump of trees.

Twenty miles must have separated the fugitives from the scene of their night's encampment. Two hours' pasturage was given to the animals, and the same time for feasting to the masters.

They resumed the march, after having left marks tending to make the pursuers believe that they had passed the whole night there; though, riding on until nightfall, they added another score of miles to the space between.

They made a short stoppage, lit fires and ate a hasty supper, after which, mounting, they traced a circuit of five miles, wheeled suddenly to the west, and camped at about three o'clock in the morning a day's ride from their last stage.

At the end of several days of such moves, alternate dashes and halts, the band

found themselves in one of the clearings in which they had already encamped.

Jim Boyce and his friends the miners had indeed taken up the trail of the banditti, on the following day to that on which Joaquin, in scouting for himself, had entered the lion's jaws.

Every night they halted by the abandoned fires, hoping—a very natural calculation—that eventually they would come in contact with the Mexicans, however far the latter might go. They were not experienced "trailers," or they might not have been deceived with the "planted" tracks.

Joaquin could hardly constrain his smile of immense satisfaction when he discovered, by tokens that could not lie, that Boyce, whom he considered as the most dangerous enemy, had fallen into the trap and was even now in motion forward quite near him.

Night was come.

After having galloped all day long over mount and plain, through forest and water, the chasers, seated at ease around one of the last fires of Joaquin, which they had raked together and rekindled, smoked while chatting and laughing.

Their tired horses did not reveal the proximity of strangers, but there were strangers indeed in the shrubbery.

The robbers had crept in towards the campers-out as close as they dared, and their extended weapons covered each a breast of which the heart was soon to cease to throb.

All of a sudden, some twenty shots rattled out one close upon another into a long blending of reports.

The ring around the fire burst into flame for a moment just as a sable cloud gapes to emit the lightning, and these who were not stricken by the first discharge, beheld aghast twelve or fifteen of them stretched on the ground.

Another volley lessened the number of the survivors.

Panic-stricken, the only two Americans left unharmed so far—one of whom was Boyce himself—flung themselves into the thicket and, without thinking of choosing any particular direction, rushed through the gloom at that pace assumed by fugitives when they fear the motto is: *deuce take the hindmost*.

Joaquin was already having the fire revived, for a dead body or two had fallen across it and scattered the embers, and was searching for Mr. Boyce as earnestly as Edith looking over the heaps of dead at Hastings for the last of the Saxon kings.

Jack of the mutilated hand, springing from here to there like a tigress robbed of young, waving his dagger, was pitilessly finishing those of the fallen who still breathed.

It may or it may not be known to everybody that the death resulting from a bullet gives the corpse extreme pallor.

The bodies extended on the sward, illuminated by the fitful flaring of the fire, presented a sight so hideous and repulsive, especially where widely open eyes seemed to follow you everywhere as in pictures, that the captain could not help a shudder seizing him.

"If you have searched them all," said he, "let us be off from here. We will camp till morning in a more cheerful place."

When they settled down for the night in a neighboring spot, making an in-road into the liquors by leave of the leader for rejoicing over the almost perfect triumph, on the principle of double-grog being served out to the tars who have beaten off a pirate, it was found that sleeping would have to be deferred.

Songs and stories took up the time. One of the latter which was less exceptionable to the others for certain reasons, was as follows:

"Now, Carillo, for your turn," said the bandits to the one who was lying comfortably on the flat of his back, the smoke of his cigarette curling out of both mouth and nose.

"I hardly know what to tell. Anyhow, here's the first that comes to mind.

Some time ago, I was at Calaveritas, which, became *warm, in truth*, to me, as you'll see. I had a dispute with a girl, and, forgetting myself, I slapped her in the face. Oh, I know I was wrong, I know one ought never to strike a woman unless it is to strike her dead. But I did it. She left the house with that look in her eye that spoke loud enough. I left directly after her, but she had already given the alarm.

The whole place was up in arms against me, and I dared not leave it at the time as every Mexican was arrested in the streets and made to give an account of themselves. I was securely hid, though.

At about four in the morning, I, dreading daylight, determined to attempt a sortie, and I did get out of the village.

But who should I espy on the road but a line of men, whom I recognized as a lot of simple Dutchmen living thereabouts, whom I had been remarking as they had shown all that greenness a rider of the road liked to meet.

An idea struck me, and I won't say that the last two or three drinks which I had taken, had nothing to do with making me so daredevilish.

I had made out to get around them, leading my horse, and might have rode off unchallenged, but, instead of that, I hid my nag in the chapparal, and walked back on the road.

"Standt still, you! or I shoot you, ——" said one of the Dutchmen in beautiful English.

"Up came the rest, surrounding me. As I had calculated, all had the guns which they had brought over from their own land, I suppose, and they were not the men to purchase hundred-dollar Colt's. I laughed to myself. I pretended to fancy them Joaquin's gang, ha, ha! only putting on the broken English."

"Does I look's if I bees a Woukin?" roars a big paunch, who would make seven of our chief.

"I let myself be convinced after a while, and on learning that they were waiting for a robber, I offered to stay with them and assist. 'God! didn't I run myself down? I said I knew this Carillo for having taken money out of my pockets at least once—no lie there, amigos! I called myself a great rascal, a red-ball of villainy, a king-pin of wickedness, a knave of the pack of thieves. In a word, I got 'upon an egg' with 'em easily. We drank together of course. Still Carillo did not come. At last, says I, I must be off to town, when, just as I was going, I added:

"'I may meet him,' and I stopped. 'Oh, I say, if you hear me fire anywhere near here, you'll run up and help?'

"'Snalipolersneitchenbangtherrengauuterskinwett,' says one.

"'What?' says I.

"'Oh, I means to say—yaas, yaas, we will see you all richt, all richt, all richt,' says old capacious fifty times and wagging his head.

"Off I went towards the town. I wasen't twenty steps off before I set up a shouting and let off two barrels of my revolver. Up rolled the Dutchmen.

"'There he goes, there, there! fire,' cried I, and expended another charge.

Bang, bang, bling, bang! went their young cannon of fowling pieces and rifles.

"'Where is de teef?' roared the head man, blowing the smoke out of his heavy goose-gun.

"'Here he is,' answered I, covering them with my revolver, 'down with your blunderbusses and shell out.'

"And so I robbed them every man, and ran up the road. By the time they awoke from the start I gave them, I was half a mile off."

CHAPTER XII.

CARILLO IS CORRALLED.—MELEE AT PHœNIX QUARTZ MILL.—A CAMP OF CHINESE, TWO AMERICANS, FOUR GERMANS.—FLORESCO PARTS COMPANY NOT EXACTLY AS HE WISHED.—JACK HAS A FEAST.

Two or three days later, the band paid a visit to the tent of the luckless association who had dropped mining to take up man-hunting. After having attended to the pack-mules and a few remaining horses, they began to search for the gold, and dug up cache'd dust to the value of fourteen thousand dollars. The delighted ravagers retired to Yacqui Camp, which is not far from San Andreas, where they had a retreat.

On the morning after his arrival there, Joaquin sent of half a dozen of his coyotes under charge of Valenzuela to Arroyo Cantuva with the live stock which could not elsewhere be disposed of, and with greater portion of the gold.

The residue of the robbers he kept by himself and began a series of ventures against the wayfarer and the wealthy, killing and plundering everybody who came under his hands.

For many miles around San Andreas and Yacqui Camp, there was nothing talked of but the audacious thefts and murders, and not a soul could tell how they had been committed nor how the stolen goods could be disposed of and not have drawn detection upon the desperado authors.

Men dotted the roads here and there and yet none, coming up even when the body was warm, had seen the hand that dealt the blow.

All that was clear was the unpleasant certainty that, like ghosts, bravos and pillagers were stalking among them without being suspected.

Hence, on every side, men scrutinized their neighbors, though they had known them for months, and people almost drank in the old Danish fashion, knife in hand.

Captain Ellis, deputy sheriff of the county, mustered a company from among the bold hearts of the San Andreas citizens and, as soon as possible, took up the pursuit of the highwaymen.

Having learnt by a spy that Joaquin was at Yacqui Camp and that one of his gang was a steady customer at the monte table, he went without loss of time to the designated place, recognized the man of whom he had received the description and arrested him.

Carillo, for he it was that had been betrayed (some say by that woman whose face he had confessed to have laid his palm upon), was sentenced to receive a short shrift and a long rope instanter, as an assassin and thief, but he was promised pardon if he would reveal the secret of his comrades' refuge.

The brigand refused disdainfully, but still he consented, for the same reward to help Justice in some other way by which his complicity would not be seen by his mates.

But, remarking that this proposal was not favorably received, he changed his tone, and in one of bravado, said :

" Go ahead with your work. If you'll take the trouble," added he, braggingly, " to capture our baggage, you'll find in a valise that belongs to me a dagger which is still encrusted with the blood of a Yankee whom I slew. I should not wonder but that I have settled twenty of you with it. You can only kill me once, that's one good thing ! "

It may easily be supposed that this speech would be replied to only as it deserved. The boaster, without any further ado, was slip-noosed under a tree, and the wagon, on which he was made to stand, was driven from under him, and so good bye to another private of Joaquin's ranks.

The associates of Captain Ellis, heeding only their rage, thereupon proceeded with their work, destroying and burning the huts and dens that might serve as lairs to the coyotes.

The flames shot up from peaks and cast a light over the country as a sort of signal to show how seriously the citizens of San Andreas had taken their share in the matter in hand.

Joaquin, who was posted with his confederates on a not far distant hill, saw all these proceedings.

"My men are leaking away, like mercury out of the limestone pores," muttered he. "Bah! See the fires! Whew! if they had hold of us, I would not wonder at all at them roasting us in the innocent brush they are burning up. Poor Carillo! He hasn't been able to shuffle off the coil that twisted his poor neck! No doubt, he's gone to see his old commander Jurata. Caramba! the first twenty English, German, French or Statesmen that I meet shall follow him to hell and pay for my giving them the passage."

Convinced that Captain Ellis and his company indefatigable as himself, would be scouting all over the country next day, he withdrew to the mountains, his intention being to gain as soon as possible the spot appointed as the main rallying-place, to gather all his men without delay and to give battle to any moderate party of hunters who might follow him too closely.

As they passed along near the quartz-crushing mill of the Phoenix Company a few miles from the camp, several individuals, entrenched in the building, so to say, poured a volley on the Mexicans, of whom they slightly wounded two.

On the instant, Joaquin called a halt and returned the fire.

As the assailants did not show themselves, he made a charge into the building with Three-fingered Jack and his five or six others.

They found inside only two men, Americans, who, with that contempt for the "greasers" which resembles the ignorant scorn, far from as well-based, which the John Bulls, entertained in Waterloo days' for the Gaul, valiantly showed an unflinching front to the force thrice their number.

But in a minute, during which ten or twelve revolver shots were made, they were overpowered.

Jack dragged them out into the road and did not cease plying his knife until he had shockingly mutilated the corpses. Meanwhile, the leader and his men let off several shots more into different corners of the place, but, not liking the idea of either getting into the loft or descending into the cellar, the entrances of which places one man could defend against at least the first half dozen, they left, and all pursued their route.

On the other side of Bear Mountain, at which they arrived by a road that follows the San Domingo Creek chain, the Mexicans came upon an encampment of Chinese, on whom they levied to the extent of six or seven hundred dollars, which was all that was owned by the subjects of the Celestial Empire.

"Not a very rich streak in the *lode*," joked Jack Three-fingers, who could not refrain from a manifestation of great anxiety on seeing the poor weak wretches.

So deeply did he interest himself in removing them from misery that he desired to effectually spare them from further pangs of existence; but Joaquin ordered him to ride on and bide time till Americans should be encountered.

They crossed the river at Forman's Ranch, and followed the highway along the waterside as far as the San Andreas Road.

About a mile from the town, they made an elbow and ascended an eminence not far from Greaserville.

On the way, two miners who were traveling on foot, were riddled with bullets and handed over to torturer Jack in such a state that the miscreant, to satisfy his craving for blood, could merely cut their throats and smash in their faces with his riding-boots.

While going by a creek near Angel Camp, the marauding party entered a tent in which four Germans were sleeping.

They aroused them and, pistol to ear, steel to throat, forced them to give up all the money and its equivalent that they had in the world, that is: a little over two hundred dollars.

Garcia let his comrades leave without him. When they were a few steps off, he sprang upon the poor fellows and, with one of his most terrific blasphemies, swore that he would cut their hearts out to pay them for not having more money.

The action would have followed close upon the words had not Joaquin, retracing his steps, interposed and overcome his executioner's intention by saying that he was not going to permit cool butchery.

It will be remarked that Murieta displayed the temper of fits and starts that his blood is accustomed to evince.

The monster was compelled thus to give over the pleasure which he had hugged to himself in anticipation; he tried once more, however, to give the troop the slip and turn back, but the commander of the cutthroats had his eyes on him and put a second veto to his motion.

The late recruit, Floresco, who had been made to stain his hands, had already had some words with his superior.

"Captain," he had said, during a halt, "I'd like a word with you."

"Speak away."

"I bring back the revolver and knife and the honor of belonging to your band which you gave me. I've found out that this bush-fighting don't suit me. I'm too lazy. I think I'll see what t'other life is."

"All right. You can clear," remarked Joaquin coolly.

The young fellow was delighted.

"Captain, you're a regular King of Knaves."

"So you say."

"By the bye, about how much does my share amount to in the common bank?"

"Well, you *had* something like a thousand, I suppose, if the horses are sold."

"Well, well say a thousand, down."

"You mistake," said Joaquin, sternly, "I said you had so much, when you belonged to my troop——"

"What! would you——"

"Senor Floresco, you came to us empty-handed, I let you go away the same, charging nothing for your keep during the meantime, and you will admit that you lived high, in expectation of dying higher yet. Think yourself lucky that I don't blow out your brains."

"I'd better stay at the old trade, in that case."

"I should think so."

For a while, the would-be deserter had kept quiet; then he had gradually broken out into a strain of mutinous talk which had made the captain watch him attentively. A few days after the last robbery, Floresco had drawn rein while the troop were on the way, and observed firmly that he was not going to ride any farther as he had some particular business which called him back to Yacjin.

"What business?" inquired the chief.

"Oh, only a little private matter," answered the other carelessly.

"I don't doubt that," returned the leader, "but I cannot give you leave at this moment. My design is to unite all the members of my band at the chief rallying-place, and, unless you give me a good and solid reason, I cannot grant you what you solicit."

"I did not solicit, I demanded," rejoined the young bandit haughtily.

"Your demand, Señor Floresco, your demand is out of place," sneered the captain, over whose lips passed a faint smile of scorn.

"Any place or time is good enough for me," said the rebel. "I think this the hour, and this the place when and where I *take* my leave. You don't seem to be in the humor for talking just now, so off I go and put off our discussion till hereafter."

At the same time, with a wary eye though, he began to wheel his horse, when out came Joaquin's revolver and a command for him to stop.

"Hold!"

"Well, what now?" said the bandit, drawing bridle.

"I think you are a traitor," returned the leader, furious at being so cavalierly treated before several new members of his force; I don't doubt that you're backing out to sell the secrets of our comrades."

"Oh, think what you like!" answered the rebel, drawing his revolver in a significant manner and meeting his master's eyes with a glance both insolent and threatening.

"Ha!" exclaimed Joaquin, "by the true and holy cross, you shall have your leave, if only for your impudence."

At almost the same time, two shots rang out.

The captain had had all the advantages given by a forestalling in firing, and Floresco, mortally hit, unable to keep foothold in the madrona-wood stirrups, reeled and fell sidewise off the horse.

The animal, on feeling the reins loose and the awful bit's spike dropping, sprang away in terror and relief, but, after a plunge or two, let itself be overtaken and led back by one of the band.

"He's got the *discharge!*!" said Garcia, laughing at his own jest.

All the robbers united in highly blaming the folly and insubordination of Floresco, for, when the innocent do not escape after their death it is not likely the wicked will ever be unspared, and felicitated their superior in so summarily inflicting the lesson.

"He asked for time and place—I gave him eternity and a grave," observed Joaquin.

Some two hours after this, as a road was being used which buried itself deeply in the mountain gorges, the troop found itself, in presence of a freshly established camp of five Chinamen.

Though they were every one armed with knife and Derringer, they made no effort to use them, for either attack or defence, but fell on their knees for life.

But Floresco's resistance had put this Massaroni of the Mines in no sweet state of mind and he nodded to Three-fingered Jack.

Without throwing away one minute, the latter flew at the unfortunate wretches and, with flaming eyes and gnashing tooth like a wild beast, he poignarded them successfully.

While the plunderers of the placers were thus carrying on their detestable calling in the country, with an activity that equalled their audacity, more than once an excitement like to "steamer-day," brought the people upon Montgomery Street to see "Joaquin who had been taken at last!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RETIREMENT OF THE RAVAGERS.—A PANTHER HUNT.—THE LOVERS.—AR-KANSAW'S LITTLE ARMY.

ON arriving at Arroyo Cantura, the grand master of the marauders was convinced that they had not been inactive; several hundred horses galloped about over the plain, careering in delight at being at liberty.

Instead of the ordinary rude camp, rose very pretty tents, clustered together into quite a pretty village.

Grouped around, the brigands were passing the hours in playing cards or dreamily smoking.

A little way off, on a knoll well carpeted with sward, seated beside their gallants, seven or eight girls, their black eyes glittering, were smiling, laughing, and chatting with the greatest lightness of heart.

As soon as Joaquin had entered the circle of his followers, compliments and congratulations began to be showered upon him from all sides.

At the same time the necklace of a woman's arms encircled his neck and the beaming eyes of Clarina welcomed him. Her joy at meeting him again prevented her from uttering a word.

After his thanks to his confederates, the chief withdrew with his mistress. They sat down under the trees at some distance.

"Joaquin," murmured the girl, as her magnificent tresses were tossed back from her shoulders and bosom, "you've been so long away that I could not help feeling sad, and fearing the worst. And lonely as I have been, it was dreadful to be thinking, thinking, grieving all the while."

"Lonely, Clarina? how's that, when here's half a dozen gay ones about you."

"Alas! it was their very mirth that made me more sorrowful."

"Indeed! explain yourself! I must know the cause of your moodiness. Weeping? Is the thing so serious as all this?"

"I am weeping," said she, hiding her face. "I cannot, cannot help my tears flowing—my heart is ready to break. Do you remember your promise? Oh, when will you give up this dangerous and detestable mode of life to return to our dear, beautiful land?"

"Our land? Oh, would to heaven that I had never left it, I would not be at this moment what I am! But, have courage, Clarina. A few months more, and we will see again the days of our youth. These hours of darkness will float all away."

A shadow lingered on the girl's face at remembrance of the peaceful past, but as with her truly womanly nature, she loved Murieta in spite of all his crimes, she brightened when she gazed into those eyes which had never lowered before any man's, and met her's now hopefully.

She found excuse for him in the treatment which he had unjustly met, treatment as bitter as the waters of Laguna Sal.

She knew most intimately the story of his mind, its sufferings, its yielding to passions and the long course of villainy which had followed the loss of its former purity.

He had declared to her that he would put an end to his career as soon as his vengeance should be glutted and he should have obtained money equal to what he estimated his losses to be.

Then, he added, he would retire into Sonora, where he would live in the woods with her.

She listened to his project with the utmost confidence, for he was sincere in his intentions, and he cared little for whatever the world might think of him, regarding him herself, as was natural, as the handsomest, noblest and most generous of men.

She was not wise enough to have remarked that the greatest criminals have always foiled their aims by never knowing when to leave off.

"Are we now near to happiness?" she asked in her sweetest voice.

"Yes, my love. My vengeance is all but satisfied, and my fortune will be complete when I shall have added a few more thousands to it."

As he finished these words, illustrative of the pitcher going too often to the well, he was disturbed by one of his men coming up at a gallop to seek him.

What he had to say will be repeated after a few events previously occurring are related.

One of the bandits, while hunting, had come upon the track of a panther, quite fresh, and he brought the news to camp.

The rest determined to have some excitement and they entered the woods. For a quarter or half an hour, the bushes were beaten fruitlessly.

Then, a pistol shot was heard, and all ran in towards the point, greatly contracting the circle.

The lithe beast had tried to steal past Guerro and Antonio, one of whom had repulsed him with a snap shot, which missed him however.

The whole ring closed, amid shouting, and the poor animal, more frightened than ferocious, did not know which way to turn.

He made a couple of rushes but did not dare to receive a volley.

At last, the continual popping of fire-arms made it desperate and it was seen every now and then leaping up and down in the brush.

So small was the circle of hunters now that they were nearly in double ranks.

The critical moment came.

Creeping forward, belly to ground, and the grass hiding it somewhat, the long, slender body approached one part of the human enclosure.

A spring placed it on a low-lying oak bough, from which a second leap took it straight at the heads of Garcia and three of his neighbors, who stooped or drew themselves to one side or the other.

Jack, while falling on his knees, fired two barrels of his revolver at the smooth-skinned form cleaving the air above and by him, and when the brute touched the ground, it tumbled over a bush upon its nose in a confused manner that told of the balls having entered its body. It sought to fly, having had enough of fighting, but a general discharge riddled it from tip of tail to ear, and it rolled over in the wild clover, making the dust fly in its agony. Without waiting to bid his companions stop, Jack jumped upon the body and, avoiding the claws more by good fortune than from any prudence, drove his knife through nerve and bone into one of the glazing eyes. He took good care to jump back at the moment.

The tortured beast, as if galvanized, bent nearly double, gave a dreadful "lashing out" like a vicious horse with the powerful hind feet, and, gnashing its teeth, rolled over and over like a cat in a fit.

At last, the paroxysm died away, and the carcase lay motionless, with stiffening limbs and exposed teeth.

"The skin is almost too much riddled to be of any good," remarked Valenzuela, as he saw Garcia plying his knife in flaying the warm body.

"I only want some strips of skin—hello!" exclaimed Jack interrupting himself, and suddenly quitting his stripping off the hide to dig into the belly with his blade. "Boys, scatter and find a fresh trail—here's half a ramrod of a gun, and none of us carried any."

"None," said Garcia, "but are you sure it ain't an old wound?"

"Why, nothing could live long with so much in them—four inches of hickory and an iron top," said Jack, holding up the unusual projectile. "No wonder the panther fought shy of us. She was only recovering from a hurt."

"Yes, yes, I see."

They let the chase of animals go for that of the suspected man or men. At length, about a mile from Cantura Creek, one of the out-lying scouts struck a quite fresh trail, made by no less than twelve or fifteen men.

This was the intelligence which had been brought to the leader.

It was important to give no stranger time to leave the valley after having been so near to the bandits' den as to have divined their proximity, else they must have been blind fellows not to be supposed to have taken to desert life.

Such an event as the secret being spread was defeat to the Mexican chief's

plans, at the same time as compelling him to change the head-quarters of his band.

Choosing without delay one of his best mounts, Joaquin started off, accompanied by twenty selected bravoes, foremost among whom were his usual right-hand men Three-fingered Jack and Valenzuela, the no less brave and faithful Guerra, Antonio and Fernando.

This detachment followed the discovered track at a "pressing pace," as the language of the turf goes, for a couple of hours, when there suddenly appeared before them eight or nine Americans, who were holding in their horses, waiting carelessly for them to come on.

They hesitated for an instant, slackened their pace and halted at a dozen yards' distance.

Joaquin had remarked that one of the strangers was that miner who had tried to arrest him in a gambling saloon of Sonora.

"What brings you into this valley?" challenged the captain of banditti, pushing on for a horse's length further to better see that man's features and make sure of his belief.

The leader of the party hesitated.

Now Arkansaw (as the man was nick-named, who had failed to take Joaquin) had been so tormented by the rough jokers for his miss, that he had made up his mind that he would endeavor once more to make his word true.

He found a difficulty in getting as many men as he required, and, with one or two friends who did stand by him, he joined a company of twelve formed by the present leader, a New Englander whose speculative turn had seen a fair chance in the high rewards out for the Mexican brigand, and off they had gone.

He had formed the idea that the chief was a dare-devil enough, but that his supporters were a cowardly crew of cutthroats, who were nothing except he inspired them.

But the sudden appearance of Joaquin at the head of a score of men well-equipped, well-mounted and armed, all ugly-looking desperadoes, threw the speculator on banditti stock all aback, and he, though brave enough, too, would have liked to have steered one way or another or gone about altogether with every stitch of sail out a low, aloft and on studding-sail-booms, at the bold challenge.

He had such a vein of circumspection within him, that he felt sure nothing was to be gained by fighting unless a bullet or a knife-blade is a benefit.

So he kept silent.

Joaquin grew more and more impatient, and cried in a tone no sweeter than his former speech was couched in:

"Did you hear me, or must I explain myself more clearly?"

"Oh, I heard," answered the Yankee, as he took a quarter of a fresh plug as a chew, and glanced around on his associates as if to ask them what should be done.

"Then, what do you say? Quick? Who are you, and what in the name of hoof and horns fetches you into this valley?"

"Hold on, *stranger*, no hurry," replied the other, who had "calculated" on his best course. "Give a man time to turn over what you say. You don't seem to be half-civilized by the way you hurry up the cakes. Let the water fill the sluice, can't you? To say something, though, and give you a lesson in politeness, our presence in this district of which you seem to be the selectmen, is because we are a band of hunters after game. If you don't want to pick a muss, we won't disturb *you*! There! what do—"

At these words, which the hardy members of this prudent general's army heard in disgust, surprise and scorn appeared on their bronzed phizés.

Several dull growls had already been audible, like the warning voices around Cape Mendocino.

With a curse, Arkansaw put his horse in advance of the speaker's.

"Boys, I'm cap., now, eh?"

"You, yes! sail in! To h— with *him*!"

"I'm sure I know you!" cried Arkansaw, charging Joaquin. "You are—
Crack—ack—ack! went the Mexicans' pistols to cover their chief.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HAND-TO-HAND TUSSLE.—ARKANSAW AND THREE-FINGERS.—ESCAPE OF THE AMERICAN.—THE ARROYO DESERTED.

RANG—blang, blang! went the reply fire, while a chorus of hostile cries rent the smoke.

Joaquin's first barrel sent its missile close to the on-coming Arkansaw, but it slew, not him, but the Yankee whose place the bolder man had assumed.

The chief received a wound on the left shoulder, which a side-turn in his saddle had only kept from his throat.

All were mingled in a general confusion. Five of Joaquin's men had lost their seats never to move again, two of the opponents, beside the speculative, deposed leader, had fallen under the combatants' feet like them, but all the wounded were fighting on.

The Americans, who suffered the most from pistol-shots, did all they could to close in, and butt-ends of firearms and knives were principally employed.

Through the medley of oaths, groans, shouts and detonations, were to be heard the voices of the leaders, encouraging and urging them on, while fighting themselves most vigorously, the Mexican like a puma, the other like a grizzly.

Wounded and bleeding, but as brave and bold as ever, Murieta ran his horse hither and thither through the tangled mass, and showed himself everywhere at the points where the result was wavering, deciding victory often by his simple coming.

The attacking party fought a little despairingly now. For a moment, they had held the advantage over their antagonists, and they would have kept it, only for the unseen devil that seemed to continually attend the bandit chief, and overcome the foeman's courage and vigor.

After having emptied his revolver on the enemy, Three-fingered Jack had flung the weapon into the nearest face, and with his usual ferocity, had begun plunging about with his poignard right and left, and before him, so blindly that at times he had wounded his own comrades and their horses.

When Joaquin, after having unhorsed one of the most prominent of the assailants, could survey the scene of action more calmly, he saw that nine of his men were doubtlessly the same number of trodden corpses that strewed the ground. All the others except one were sleeping in death beside them.

The sole survivor, of whom we speak, was the robust giant Arkansaw, who was stoutly giving Three-fingered Jack all he wanted, each with a knife in hand.

The first, no doubt having had great experience in the steel, was indeed, raining more stabs and cuts than he had to parry, which contributed not a little towards augmenting the rage of Garcia.

Joaquin and the rest of the band, except such as had wounds to staunch, glad of a rest and a treat at the same time, sat their horses, tranquil spectators of the struggle, confident as they were of the issue from their knowledge of their comrade's powers and address.

Now reining in, now letting slip, now wheeling, then lifting their foam-flecked horses, whose jaws ran blood and their neck and fore-shoulders as well from

mis-directed blows, the two champions crashed their blades triflingly, so to say waiting to deal the mortal, finishing stroke.

"You jes' give fair play a leettle longer," muttered Arkansaw, "that's all!"

Jack swore all the time, and roared a tremendous execration at length when he fancied that he had got the opening that he so much desired.

He gave a short, quick thrust, as if he had held a sword, drew back, changed his grasp on the bloody handle and delivered a dreadful downward darting of his knife which, splendidly warded off by the bowie, which made the thinner stiletto bend, ripped up the thigh of Arkansaw.

On this cruel wound, and feeling that indescribable sensation of hot blood scalding the gash it boils through, the latter so dexterously glided his arm under the other's that the broad blade, prevented from penetrating the eye by a miracle, laid bare the top of the Mexican's cheek-bone and left a clean cut from there down the cheek to the very edge of the lower jaw-bone; had the mouth been open, the cheek would have been perforated.

Garcia, whose set teeth ground in agony at the awful pain when the bone was scraped, all but yelled, and swayed in the saddle. His horse fell back, just as Arkansaw made a second sweeping stroke.

The Mexicans, alarmed, hastened to the succor of their comrade, but he, recovering himself, forced them to stand off with horrid imprecations. They obeyed but it was plainly to be seen that they were eager to finish the American, if he continued to conquer.

Arkansaw felt clearly that, do his utmost, yet he could gain nothing by continuing to fight, so—only waiting to catch one of Jack's stabs on his left arm, and to make a return—he lifted his horse round on its hind legs and pricked him on into a flight swift as lightning. His savage antagonist, as well as Joaquin, followed him at a distance.

For five miles, the chase went on, Joaquin remaining a little behind Garcia, who nearly touched the fugitive every time he made a "burst." Thus forcing the pace, he often got so near that he lifted his dagger, but at that instant, the American would compel his steed to make a "spurt," and down would drop the steel powerless. Jack swore continually and louder and loudly as he felt his mount failing him.

The chief, who had taken much out of his charger by his plunging about the battle-field, was dropped behind considerably, and, when he had been within pistol-range, Three-fingered Jack's motions in the saddle had prevented him risking a shot. Jack had no fire-arms.

Arkansaw showed himself to be a consummate rough-rider, and he had that art, little cultivated, of conversing with his horse as though he were a man. He would tell him of the impediments in the way, of the nature of the ground, of the state of the pursuing party, promise him food in profusion, laugh to him, chide him, pat him, smooth his mane, and whisper hopeful words in his turned-back ears, to which he was bowed forward. Whether it affected the animal or not, it at least pleases the rider.

"Good old nag," said Arkansaw, at length, after a glance over his shoulder, "they're no where, my boy!"

He laughed, and the horse stretched out in a greyhound's leap, as if new powers had been given him.

In fact, convinced that, from some cause or other, the fugitive was getting more out of his horse than they out of theirs, which might be foundered if the chase was prolonged, Joaquin called off his hound, and the two baffled bandits walked their horses back to their confederates. The wounded were still there, under care of some of their comrades, who understood a little of the healing art.

Fernando Fontes and another had received such wounds that they lingered on only till the morrow, their deaths bringing the whole loss to eleven.

The chief though he was not hurt in a very serious manner, had lost much blood, and he was obliged to keep quiet for several days, and receive such attentions as were lavished upon him by the loving Clarina.

Antonio and Guerra, no less lucky than their commander, found in the tender solicitude of their *inamoratas* relief to their sufferings; hence, these three were set a-field anew at the time when their less-favored companions were just coming round.

Murieta could not help feeling some uneasiness at the recollection of the sturdy survivor of the American party.

He reproached himself for ever having given him the chance to make off, when a dozen bullets might have been bestowed upon him during his conflict with Three-fingered Jack.

A fortnight had already elapsed since the bloody skirmish and, if the escaped man had not died of his wounds there was everything to lead one to believe that he would raise a body of adventurers, there being many hangers-on about the diggings who would ask nothing better than such "sport."

At all events, the story he had to tell would have its effect on the various bands resting on their arms, which were ready to rise against the ravagers at the first report of his whereabouts.

Arkansaw would probably offer himself as guide to such.

In the dread of such an event, Joaquin resolved to abandon for the present at least the asylum on which he had set his choice.

By this means, he thought to deceive the seekers, who, on arriving and finding the valley untenanted, would imagine that the banditti had retired into Mexico, or else they would divide into smaller detachments in their scouting, when, each of them might be attracted into defiles and passes in the mountains and there destroyed, at the cost, to his hidden, securely-posted men, of scarcely one.

In this design everything was got ready for the departure.

The horses, which amounted to several hundreds, were formed into manageable droves and started for Mexico under guard of four of the best vaqueros of the band. The tents were taken down and packed upon the mules, as well as everything around the camping-ground which could be of any use.

The women attired themselves in their masculine traveling-habits and prepared bravely and gaily to cross highlands and low, dark gorges and sunlit peaks; there were not only privations and fatigues to be resisted, but, at any moment, from the craggy wall at whose foot they trailed along, might spring out or roll down the treacherous American lion or the grizzly bear.

Those of the wounded in that late encounter where the fallen Americans had sold their lives dearly, who had not yet been restored to strength, were placed on the easiest goers in the cavalcade, which had been previously used by the women.

The patient being seated on comfortable Mexican saddles, as large almost as an elephant's howdah, were for the more precaution, attached to them by straps, and had a free rider leading them.

Thus, the robbers streamed out of the valley, a long line of a hundred and six men and nine females.

It was not without regret that farewell was said to the magnificent retreat, so wild and desolate-looking of a sudden, which had lately been witness of their rejoicings, pleasures and repose.

At the head of the column, rode Joaquin, surrounded, like a Napoleon of marauders, by his marshals, by his lieutenants.

His handsome features wore an expression of sadness and gravity, as he explained to his companions the reasons which had led him to quit Arroyo Can *tuva*, a kind of another unconsumed Moscow.

CHAPTER XV.

THE JOURNEY.—THE NEW HEAD-QUARTERS.—THE PLAN.—REPULSED AT THE RANCH.

THE journey did not suffice to distract the captain of banditti from his constant reveries. The memory of his last affair with the party of self-appointed police, still tortured his mind; though it had been almost completely defeated, nevertheless he had paid very dear for an unconsiderable victory, and was compelled to acknowledge the powerlessness of his men at close-quarters with the brave by intelligence men of the superior race.

He regretted that the whole of his troop was not composed of individuals as active and fearless as Three-fingered Jack, Valenzuela, Antonio and Guerra.

Enraged at having let Arkansaw escape, he was compelled to admit as well that the redoubtable Garcia was neither invulnerable nor successful all the time and that he was no longer the Inconquerable of other days.

He was the strongest, the cruellest, the most cunning and resolute of all his cutthroats; he had been whilom the favorite, the right hand man of Jurata the famous guerrilla; moreover, he was wonderfully assisted by a long experience, carrying on his body scars of many wounds received in numberless actions.

If this champion had come off only second-best in a fight with Arkansaw, no wonderful man, would the rest of the gang be well off when pitted against fellows of that stripe. It was not probable.

Joaquin was sure that his interest enforced his avoiding any heavy contest with the followers of justice, regulars or irregulars.

A combat of this nature, even admitting the result to be fortunate to him, would deprive him of a number of his foremost men, not to be replaced without time and difficulty, which would be a serious obstacle to the carrying out of projects which he had formed at the setting out on his marauding career.

These reflections, and many others springing from them, greatly clouded Murieta's brow; for the first time he experienced a sharp and weighty desire of flinging to the winds and waters the guilty existence which he had hitherto led, to withdraw into his native country with his well-loved Clarina.

The latter, meanwhile traveling in the rear of the main body, surrounded by the associates of her own sex who were not at all affected by any forebodings, was yielding to impressions quite the opposite to those which swayed her lover; she was as merry and laughing as could well be.

She was amusing herself perforce and vying with her companions in a kind of pastime in which the victor was the one who was most mirthful.

The countless echoes which were bandied back from either enclosing line of rocky steeps, repeated their songs and peals of merriment, until it might have been believed that it was a virgin forest of the tropics full of bright birds with melodious throat.

After having traversed the rich hollows which extend northward of Tulare Lake, the Mexicans crossed the San Joaquin River some twelve miles from Fort Miller, and pushed on towards the north-east as far as the falls of the Yohamite.

Thence, passing the stream again, they worked toilsomely up the Sierra Nevada, then down into the pleasant, the delightful, the tempting valleys on the other side and at length reached the mountains on the east of Lake Mono.

In their gullies, clefts and passes, the outlaw, at the commencement of his adventures, had found shelter from some volunteer constables who had chased him and his then insignificant allies from Hangtown to Castle Peak, not far from the Sonora Pass. Since then he had always looked upon this spot as the best and surest hiding-place in the whole State.

The chief took the lead through a narrow path which would have been past suspicion so completely had nature taken pains to dissimulate it by means of precipitous rocks and super-abundance of vegetation, and when they had entered by it, they were in as retired and picturesque a site as they could have fancied. It is a mere cleft in the heights about five-and-twenty miles to the south-east of Lake Mono, between two rugged walls, crested by masses of stone and earth toppling over as if to fall.

If these sides of the narrow way were climbed, the country could be surveyed for miles around. In this wild place, near a region well stocked, if the term will pass, with red, gray and desert foxes, coyotes, wolves, and grizzlies, the robbers pitched their tents.

The shades of evening were already stealing over the sky and earth, all around seemed to invite to repose the adventurers, who were temporarily cut of the reach of their sea of troubles.

On the perfumed sward of mingled grass and moss, in their ample blankets, they slumbered until morning, with not one guard a-foot, they sleep no less peaceful and deep than that of men whose hands had never been imbrued in blood, whose hearts had never been darkened by even the idea of a criminal desire!

But it was the wearisome journey which fear of merited judgment had impelled that had alone given them this short stay of punishment.

The most hardened feel pangs of which an honest man never can dream of, far beyond any of his earthly inflictions.

On the morrow, the outlaw assembled all about him and laid out before them his plans and ideas as to the future.

“You know,” he began, “that we count one hundred in active service. Our spies, friends and associates, scattered all over in almost all the towns and camps of the state, are nearly four hundred. These allies can only aid us verbally, I mean by information which they procure for us; they cannot lend us any open assistance for reasons which it is useless to explain to you just now. I hold in secure places considerable sums, and my intention is to raise from Sonora and Lower California a certain number of recruits who will bring our forces in the field to three hundred.

“I will equip and arm these new hands and will begin a sweeping business in the southern counties. I will destroy the Yankees by wholesale, burn their farms, overrun their property, and do it all so rapidly that they shall not have time to collect troops and organize resistance. By the time they are sufficiently powerful to fetter my further movements, I will have finished my task and sought shelter in some of the Sonorian sierras. When there, I will give good-bye to the life of roving and adventures which we have led together up till now. In this way, friends, will we have taken vengeance for the evil done to us and some overplus for the wrongs which the Yankees, during the last war, wreaked upon our unfortunate country. We will do our share towards wiping out the cursed race, just as they have destroyed the buckeye-nut eaters. We will divide the spoil of the expeditions, and let the rest of our days roll on in peace.”

“Long life to the noble captain!” cried every man long and loudly.

Enthusiasm kindled every eye.

The splendid picture which had been enrolled before them was so dazzling, the design displayed so unexpected, that the bandits could scarcely contain their joy.

Although they had always loved and admired their superior throughout all the phases of his dangerous existence, none of them had given him credit for what they esteemed as genius discovered in his projects.

His speech electrified them with fresh energy and more than ever were they eager to follow and obey him, come what might.

That same day, Joaquin told off eight companies of ten men each towards different parts of the state, to the east, south and north, with the express order to procure money and horses with all their might and main.

He himself remained at the rendezvous with twenty-five, whose only occupation was the killing of game, and watching over the horses and weapons. Few days passed since the departure of the little divisions in which interval, the wounded had recovered.

Joaquin, seeing all he had in an efficient state, took with him Valenzuela and Three-fingered Jack and a select party, and went off on a scout and for any enterprise that offered.

Antonio, Guerro and the remainder were to protect the camp and the women from the roamings of the wild beasts which had not quitted the neighborhood despite the successive hunts which had been made upon them and the unpleasant acquaintance many of them had made with the firearms and steel of the band.

On arriving at Fiddletown, Joaquin met the captain of one of the troops, who had a bag of gold coin to give him and a bit of news which gave the direction to the leader's move.

* * * * *

Darkness had stolen upon Jackson, but not so deeply as to prevent a dim pleasantly vague view of the town and its surroundings.

A ranch, which an American named Fairgrove had purchased years before and since enlarged into a double house of two stories in height, occupied by him, his wife and a widowed sister and two of her children, (a girl, with whom we have little to do, and a boy of fourteen), sat upon the side of a gentle acclivity about a mile from the town, and a quarter of a mile from the road.

Down to the road, from the front of the house, the ground was almost all wooded; behind and in the valley it was under cultivation, and the products brought "gold" prices from the mining population.

Now, Fairgrove, who had been twice a loser of several valuable horses, no doubt through Joaquin's band, had tried to take his revenge by doing all he could to have that robber taken, and half a dozen times, when applied to, he had loaned horses to suddenly-organized constabulary forces.

He had made himself prematurely old by abuse of liquors, and was prevented going out thief-hunting himself, or he would surely have been at the head of a party.

Rumor had it that the marauders had turned up in those parts once again, and, as ill luck would have it, a most powerful and valiant dog which belonged to his ranch had been shot accidentally by Fairgrove's young nephew, who was practising at a mark as a study, as in more peaceful countries, he would have had Latin, or French, or book-keeping or what you will to do.

The animal had not been killed, but to shorten his agony a finishing stroke had been dealt him. For two days, Mr. Fairgrove had been going to town to buy a guardian to replace the lost one, but he was of an easy nature.

As the requirement was one in which the women folks had interested themselves, for they drank in greedily all the outrageous stories of the exploits of the celebrated bandit, the ranchero had yielded at last to the dropping fire, but continual, and rode over to Jackson to make the purchase.

This was at noonday.

He dined with a friend and took a stroll about the town to see the new buildings run up since his last visit.

It chanced that a company in which his companion was concerned had the great good fortune to turn up a large nugget, which led to a general rejoicing by all concerned.

You could not rejoice in California without the very natural concomitant, a

punishing of the "Oh, be joyful!" Mr. Fairgrove had hardly returned to his friend's abode than he laid down to rest.

He was aroused at twilight for supper.

"Had supper-time come? Good heavens! whew! won't they haul me over the coals, at home! I will take a taste of that brandy just up from 'Frisco, and must be off. Oh, I ain't afraid on the road, pooh! tush! bah!"

And off rode Fairgrove at full speed. As a speedy arrival was his only wish for—though, of course, the non-prosecution of the canine demand would still be a great grievance against him—if he should not be home, he knew how his family would cry out against having been left for one whole night with only a lad of fourteen in the house, for the stable-men and farm-hands lived in buildings two hundred feet and more from it—as a speedy arrival lay closest to his heart, he not only spurred on at his fastest, but struck off from the road across a neighbor's land and entered his estate by the valley.

The remaining effects of his libations, not altogether slept off, prompted him to attempt a little innocent practical joke.

He let his horse loose, and, hiding the harness in a bush, crept under cover up towards his house.

He was already chuckling at the fanciful picture which he drew of how he would be mistaken for a robber, and how all would end in laughter, so hearty as to cover his sin of omission.

All at once he stopped.

Two of his men had come out of the stable. Two of *his* men—no, good God, no!

This couple were sheathing knives and were stealing along towards the house.

The fumes of liquor yet clouding the watcher's mind vanished at this appeal to his affection and to his fears.

This couple were assassins, and all the workmen had been murdered, beyond a doubt!

He gripped his revolver nervously and inspected the nipples; all the caps were on.

The two men had crept up under the extensive verandah, piazza, ground-floor balcony, or whatever you like to style it, which ran around the whole building.

Fairgrove braced himself ready to run up and slay one or both before they should make an entrance, but neither climbed over the railing but crouched down and glided under the stoop, after cleverly and noiselessly ripping off a board.

There was a hollow space under the verandah of many feet long and wide, and three feet high.

As if their disappearance were a signal, two other men appeared over by the out-houses, and carefully made the same transit, burying themselves in the same way.

Two more couples, and at last one man.

All was still, and Fairgrove might have doubted his vision, especially as the displaced plank had been fitted in again.

What pained him more, so poignant was the proof of his family utterly unsuspecting the impending fate, was that there came faintly to him, a snatch of a song or a light laugh, which were uttered by his young niece.

He thought for a moment of rushing to the house and standing before the opening, prevent the thieves from the movement until assistance should have come. But he remembered that window only rudely boarded over, opened from the cellar into under the piazza, and he was quite confident that the concealed villains had already discovered it.

His men being all disposed of, no assistance was about the premises.

He could delay, but not prevent the murder of his family and the cleaning

out of his house. He took the course which was hardest and might or not be the best.

He could only go mad if they should all be slain in his absence!

He never could tell how he hastened back to where he had turned his horse a-drift, found him, caught him, bridled and saddled him, and dashed off, more directed by instinct than by calculation.

All he knew he reached the nearest neighbor's house after an hour's maddening ride, and burst in upon the supper-table with the wild, crazy cry:

"Haste! If it is not till all are asleep that they are waiting, good bye to them!"

The moment he grew cooler and told all, the friend roused the household, and set off back with him, sending one of his sons to town and another to the nearest miners' camp, which was on the road. As these latter would have the road to travel, they would probably reach the scene before the others, who had almost unbroken country to cross. If their signal should not be answered, they were to wait, unless, of course, something was occurring in or about Fairgrove's house.

It was Joaquin's men, under command of Garcia, who had made the descent on the ranch of Fairgrove. They had heard of the dog's death and, as they were all the more sure of success from that fact, which promised more likelihood of a perfect surprise, they had began as we have seen Fairgrove suspect, that is: had mastered the tenants of the out-buildings just at the moment of their entering their dwellings at dusk.

Masters were not very exacting when a harsh word or a cross look would often send a man off to the digging, whose place it would perhaps be impossible to fill at the most exorbitant of wages. Hence the short hours of labor.

Garcia had wanted to begin the proposed butchery at once, but Valenzuela, who was second, had persuaded him that it would be better to wait until eight or nine, when all would be asleep throughout the house. They did not know that the master was away, and gave the lad of fourteen credit for more prowess than he perhaps possessed.

Perhaps, you will wonder why the robbers did not charge without delay, as here were only two males against their eight or nine.

Yes, but these fellows had found by sad experience that the few women who were blessing the rude state then were, if beautiful ancestresses of the fair daughters of El Dorado's brilliant to-day, made braver yet by the encompassing perils of exposed life and were seldom so unluckily gifted with stupid relations as not to be compelled to learn to put an half-ounce of lead into the bull's eye "plum center" at a reasonable distance. All of which Amazonian discipline was accomplished at no expense of modesty, a fact which women who have had their own honor and dear ones to defend will understand, if our other readers do not.

All this time, frightening themselves for nothing, without dreaming of there really being great foundation for their fears, the females were supping uneasily and almost afraid to retire to rest. The chamber they occupied, for they would not leave one another, was on that side where were concealed the thieves. The servant and the children were in the other part.

The miners, who had been found at their encampment by the messenger, had instantly responded to the call, and, on horses or pack-mules, as the case might be, they had dashed along the road, only dismounting at the entrance to Fairgrove's ranch. Thence they ran along quietly but quickly. When they came in sight of the house, they twittered out the signal, an imitation of a bird. No response, so they waited. But very restlessly though, for they started at every noise.

At last, though only a few moments had passed, and one or two lights showed yet in the house, it was deemed best to forestall the bandits' moves.

They left the shadow of the trees and proceeded along the side of the house in hopes of surprising the enemy, when a loud scream inside was followed by a hammering as of a pistol butt on a door, and that by a shot.

At the same time that the miners raised a cheer to appal the assailants and to encourage our friends, another shout joined in with theirs, and a number of men appeared on their right speeding toward the house like themselves. Both parties of rescuers were on hand; not too early either.

One smashed in the piazza windows in front, the other forced a back window, and four or five daring men boldly penetrated the empty space under the verandah and went through the window into the cellar, which had been opened.

Some time before this, the women had consulted together on their heartlessness in leaving the young girl, the servant and the youth so far away. They resolved to have them come over to their part of the house, the females to stay with them, the lad to occupy the adjoining room. After a delay, Mrs. Fairgrove's sister-in-law valourously determined on executing the delivery of the desire, and on passing along down stairs, across the main room and up stairs, again alone, and in the dark, for she preferred, with another feminine trait, not to have a chance of seeing what she dreaded. With prudent preparation, she took off all her jewelry and put it in her pockets, winding her handkerchief round all to prevent jingling, had removed everything light-colored from her dress, which was deep mourning, fortunately. She went in her stocking feet. She left the revolver they had with her sister, gave her final directions and slipped out of the narrowly-opened door.

She descended untouched and entered the main room; as she did so, she heard on the other side the words, very faint:

"Sh! back!"

She went on, feeling for the chairs and table, and, for an instant, did not glance thitherward. When she did, she thought she saw that the door, which led to an entry and by that to the cellar, was not quite closed and she doubted not that a white dot she noted about four feet from the floor was a finger holding it ajar. The person, if there was one, had been about to enter when she, or something else, had alarmed him.

This was one of those moments when everything depended on taking the proper course out of half a dozen. If she continued her way, their return with the children would be intercepted beyond doubt. If she flew back to her sister, the house was divided, and each would hear the death-struggle of the other.

Like lightning, she sprang to the door and threw her whole weight against it. A deep, though not loud, exclamation of acute pain told her that the strange sound she heard was the snapping of that finger-bone! The door would not shut. Had it been farther open, it would have severed the finger; it crushed it, and tore off the flesh of one of the bandits, as it was. She dragged the table to her and jammed it against the door, closing fully now, and bolted hurriedly. The key was gone, lost long ago during non-use. Like one inspired she heaped up chairs and everything within reach to add to the barricade.

Pistols, bullets, and knife-handles began to hammer at the upper panels, while kicks rained on the lower ones. A dreadful pressure was exerted against it. The bolt started, and was bent out of the loosened sockets. It gave way! For a moment only, for, as fortune would have it, a tipped-up chair caught the lock with its back, while its hind legs held on the floor, and no force except that which would drive all before it, could open that door now. Still throwing on the furniture with frenzied hands, the woman worked. The robbers thought the hindrance was the lock, so a pistol was clapped to the keyhole and fired. Exhausted, for the paroxysm was over, the woman fell as if she had been shot and swooned on the carpet, fortunately for her. Her sister, at the report, screamed from upstairs. The robbers, united in one grand push, burst the door in at the hinges and tumbled over the awkward pile.

While hesitating which way to go, the cheers outside started them.

"Fire the house!" growled Garcia.

"No, no, no delay," cried another. "Back!"

The rearmost turned and went down the stairs, but were received, after a hail to which they made no reply from confusion, with a volley. They returned in quick time.

"Come on, all's up!" said Valenzuela; "follow me. We must save ourselves for the captain."

The shivering of glass of the piazza windows turned them from the front, a similar sound warned them that the back was equally impracticable.

"Hell's flames!" swore Garcia. "I'd like to be at Fairgrove's throat for rousing the country against us. We must fight out this way," and he turned towards the entry terminating in the stairs far above.

"There's somebody—" began a cautious one.

"Somebody? a woman, and alone, or she wouldn't be so noisy! I'll silence her!"

And all followed Jack's lead to the upper story: not too soon, for from three directions the storming party came into the main room, the flashing of the shots they fired at the fugitives showing them the form of the fainted woman, whom they supposed dead.

"Heaven, heaven!" answered Fairgrove, auguring nothing favorable from this first sight. "No quarter! Death, death!"

Luckily, at the very first alarm, Mrs. Fairgrove had locked herself in, and the three-fingered desperado could only fire a shot through the woodwork and was disappointed there. The whole of the Mexicans rushed through the adjoining room and jumped out upon the piazza, over which they slung themselves and slid down the columns. Here the last of them was the living target in which was buried three or four shots, and he sprang off into the air, in which he died, for it was a corpse that fell in a heap on the ground.

The others ran off, fired at by such of the pursuers as had jumped through the windows upon the top of the verandah, and by the others, who had made the circuit on perceiving their design and who had left the building by the ground-floor. Fairgrove sprang off the top and, alighting with a shock that would have used up a man under less excitement, (for he believed that his sister was undoubtedly dead and his wife at least hurt by the passing shot which Garcia had driven through the bedroom door, and after which she really fainted woman had been silent), he took the lead of the pursuers.

The flying bandits had struck for the hills sheltering the ranch, with a start of sixty or seventy yards ahead of Fairgrove, foremost of those following them. He was in advance of his friends by some twenty feet. The fugitives bounded up the hills as men can fly when death is the same as delay. The pursuers began to fire at them, but, besides the disadvantage of firing at any mark above one's standpoint, there was that of each party being in haste and motion. The fastest of the flyers had attained such an altitude by this time that they halted in the bushes to cover their comrades with their weapons, and all being together on the top, and drawing a long breath while delivering a general discharge, off they went again down the other side of the rising ground.

The chasers, pausing a moment on receiving a volley, divided into two bodies! Fairgrove with the smaller, composed of the youngest men, ran on after the robbers, while the rest prudently went quite the other way to mount their horses and try to overtake the escaped ones by this means.

But their scouring the neighborhood until morning was nearly all in vain, for all they found of the robbers was one dead and another dying, whom their companions had been compelled to abandon. The rest had reached the rendezvous, had been gloomily listened to by the captain and, almost immediately, had started off with him to Indian Creek.

CHAPTER XVI.

VALENZUELA MAKES A CAPTURE BY BEING HIS LEADER'S NAMESAKE.—THE "BANKER'S" MISTRESS.—GARCIA COMES IN HANDY.—THE DOUBLE SURPRISE AND THE DEATH OF THE GO-BETWEEN.

THE companions of the highwayman were over in Hangtown, while he stayed at the Springs, keeping quiet, after the failure to assassinate Mr. Fairgrove.

Joaquin, Valenzuela and Garcia, as a matter of course, went the rounds of the places of amusement, playing the games and making their faces a little known to the girls in the dance-houses.

We have shown sufficiently already, and will show still more clearly hereafter, how imprudent Garcia was, especially when liquor had reduced him to a less cool state of mind than natural.

From this recklessness the following true as tragic adventure arose.

One evening as Valenzuela, alone, was strolling along, he noticed that he was followed by a stranger, all the stranger, too, by its being a woman.

Women were not so numerous nor so safe up by the mines as to be out unattended after dark, for the robber not to notice this.

But, being a little inflated by drink as well as a vanity that it prompted, he twirled his moustache and beard, smiled, dark as it was, and slackened his pace.

Then, he turned abruptly and was on the woman before she could slip away, if she had so desired.

But on the contrary, she came right up to him, smiling reassuringly.

"Senor," said she in bad Spanish, and in a low voice full of mystery. "I know of a senorita, a real preciosita, who is sighing her heart out to see you close to. If you are brave enough, *brave as Joaquin* the gentleman of the highway," added she with emphasis full of meaning, "you won't be afraid to meet me under the tree, on that corner at eight to-morrow night!"

Seeing that—only pausing to be sure that she had been understood—the speaker was going to leave him, Valenzuela hastened to catch her by the arm and thus withdraw a part of the rebozo that hid her features.

"The deuce!" muttered he, disappointed and ceasing to lick his lips as he had begun to do.

The face was that of a woman, as old as the hills and less attractive by far.

"I'm a stranger, I don't know the lady, who is she?" said the bandit.

"Let me go, senor, I must be back. Be satisfied with what I said. Will you come?"

A score of thoughts flashed upon him.

His name, it was clear, and his "handsome appearance (as he thought to himself)" had made him be mistaken for his superior.

Flattering, but, if the lady of the rendezvous should turn out to be Madam Vigilance Committee—whew! So he hesitated.

"Sainted Mother of Heaven!" cried the woman who rapped out Spanish oaths better than she spoke more proper words, "can a young Mexican be a coward—pshaw! there isn't a *salteador* who wouldn't risk the noose for the beauty I speak for—"

"I'll—"

"Do it, eh?" and off she went, turning her head to show him her finger on her lips.

Valenzuela watched her—now a shadow amid the shadows, then in the light streaming out of saloons, till she was gone.

"The confounded corrupteress of virtuous youth!" swore he in mock indignation. "Cool as anything, that! What next, I wonder? Well, it'll keep,

while I look into friend Barcelonne's and imagine his daughter the beauty—the precious bait this old fisherwoman is trolling for me with!"

He thought no more about the affair till next afternoon when he woke up after a drunken slumber.

He had dressed himself for another nocturnal promenade, when he called the appointment to mind.

If the place had been the City of Mexico, or Guaymas, or even El Paso, Tubac, or Arispe he would have let the *pros* very soon overpower the *cons*.

As he hated reasoning, he settled the matter by drawing three or four coins out of his pocket and slapping them down on the table.

The Mexican eagles with their wriggling prizes of snakes, were uppermost on every piece.

"Go's the word," muttered he. "The *Libertad* is very near Libertine."

He proceeded to arm himself, with a little more care than usual, for, as he said:

"Spain, Mexico, California—countries where weapons are plenty, so that's there are daggers stuck in every girl's garter."

At the time, he went out.

The old woman was at the trysting-place and the two went on together.

* * * * *

Garcia sat before a monte table in Hannigan's saloon.

At the first of the evening, he had had great luck, but now he lost heavily, sum upon sum.

At last, Jack slowly got up, hesitated whether to upset the table and smash his chair on the heads of the crowd, did not do so fortunately, strode to the sideboard, took a glassful of some liquid preparation from the hands of a waiter, and took it all down, ice and mint-stalks at two gulps like a whale engulfing sprats and "squids."

Then he moved towards the entrance, slowly.

He had not reached it before a slight tap on his elbow made him look around or rather down, angrily, for he felt in the "tearing" humor.

A crooked, dwarfed figure of about four feet six was beside him.

He recognized the face and trunk, which was perfect, as the bankers of the very table at which his funds had been converted into decidedly sinking ones.

As the dwarf had always been seated, he had never noticed the malformation of his lower limbs, which seemed to have been visited equally wickedly by different sprites, for they were bandy, twisted, bowed, shriviled-up, and terminated in some peculiar mis-shaping of the feet, for the wadded boot was not at all of a natural shape.

The three-fingered Mexican observed all this, and therefore set down the maliciousness and imprisoned violence revealed on the countenance upturned to his to no evil meaning to him.

"Do you want to make up your loss?" squealingly hissed the dwarf, working his fingers, as exquisitely shaped as a lady's, nervously till one would have thought they were handfuls of snakes.

Jack looked down and all over the speaker.

"I don't mind," said he readily.

"Steel recovers gold often," said the Quilp of the green cloth in a hoarse tone now, for he was not master of his voice any more than a confirmed asthmatic.

"So they say," answered the bandit, most non-committally if there is such a word.

The two looked at one another, till their glances met into one of complete agreement.

The gnome gambler drew the broken gamester aside, and the two began whispering, their voices being past hearing even if they had shouted in that ev-

erlasting chorus of chinking coin, scuffling of feet, jingling of glasses, explosions of excited voices in oaths, yells or laughter.

* * * * *

Some days passed.

Joaquin the chief heard no bad tidings of his comrades and concluded no news was good news.

Garcia and Valenzuela slept off their night's libations during the morning, and had a little practice with cards in the afternoon perhaps ere sallying out, but separately now.

The latter made excuses, which must have appeared for some reason comical to his friend, for he laughed heartily to himself as soon as Valenzuela's back was turned.

Dark was coming on when Garcia and his employer, as the dwarf banker may be called, were closeted together in a little room behind the bar, where the staff of Hannigan kept their out-of-doors habiliments.

"Well?" growled the dwarf eagerly.

"There," answered the Mexican, producing a small box of enameled iron very tastefully got up and evidently a trinket-case from some lady's dressing-room.

The large eyes of the little man seemed to swell into great globes of flame.

"Hers! hers! hers!" he repeated three times in as many variations of tone.

"His! his! his!" said Garcia, not actually mocking the speaker though, whose "touchy" temperament he had learnt no doubt by this time.

With the utmost coolness, he proceeded to open the casket, of which the lock had been broken already, and lift out a packet of letters.

He untied a strip of satin binding them, divided the bundle into halves with provoking exactness and, while giving the banker one portion with his three-fingered hand, put the other into his open jacket's bosom.

"You know how to read?"—began Garcia half jesting.

But the excited dwarf had scarcely glanced at the first of the notes than the blood rushed into his face and filled the veins so fearfully that it really made his disproportioned head still larger; his eyes rolled under their brows in a way to remind those who have ever had the misfortune to see it, of the fiery hull of a destroyed steamship rocking beneath an inky cloud on the still-tossing billows that were changeful monuments over the loved but the lost gone down with the spars and life-preservers they were yet lashed to!

His excessive redness was almost immediately blanched into a pallor, quite as awful and unexpected.

He had bitten his lips or his tongue, too, for a bloody froth came out over his beard and stained with a couple of drops, the immaculate shirt-front in which glittered a wonderful diamond cluster-pin, those two chief parts of a professional blackleg's uniform.

"He's going to choke," thought Garcia, and he was almost on the point of running out to the bar for water or brandy.

But men do not swoon or suffocate so easily.

"Bitter pill, I know, but it's got to go down, and the sooner the better," said bandit Job's comforter, half aloud.

The dwarf was in too great a fury to mind him.

He leaped around the little room from side to side like some wounded animal—like a puma with shot-broken leg, till, getting more calm, he stopped at the washstand, on which was the light, and began to read with a forced tranquility that was worse than the greatest violence would have been.

He grew paler and paler, shuddered, started, seemed turned into stone till as suddenly he would shiver when he came on some passage relating to himself, perhaps, as if the rowels of a Spanish horse-breaker's spur was ploughing up his flesh.

His lips quivered at times like the poor fellows who died on the Isthmus with the fever and ague, before many another life of white and mongrel had been given to make that railroad which leaps past the deathful swamps and murderous woods.

Then again his lips would be drawn together till the least sound could not escape, and the mouth resembled those mute yet terrible old cannon that defy the rust in the ruined yet standing walls of Panama's defence.

Garcia stood ready for a frightful outbreak, inwardly rejoicing, for he was just fiend enough to relish agony of this kind, but the dwarf only said hoarsely: "I want the rest, all!"

"Five hundred is the figure," remarked the bandit, rustling the letters he had pocketed.

"What, bargain with me!" began the dwarf, giving rein to his fury's steed. "Give them up, or I'll—"

"You'll—what? Pooh!" laughed the robber *over* him, eyeing him with some such a look as a wild bull-elephant might give to a tiger-cub.

Meanwhile, the banker had checked himself, and taken out a well-filled wallet, from which he took a check.

"For six hundred and some cents on the express men of San Francisco. You can get it cashed at Sacramento, or anybody will buy it."

When the Mexican had carefully folded up the paper and put it away, he handed the letters to his patron, who grasped them with his gaze too intently fastened on them to notice how greedily the bandit had regarded his wallet.

"The same, same thing," muttered the dwarf after having scanned a few of the notes, "love for him—scorn, worse—G—d—her! for me! oh! I'll have her heart's blood never mind! Now, hark ye, amigo," continued he to the bandit, "you are in the way to make your fortune, even as fortunes rate in this blessed land. You kill this *Joaquin* and get the reward out for him, *dead* or alive! You have had considerable money already. Well! am I rating a woman's life too low at a thousand, say?"

Garcia looked as grave and calculating as a Babbage inventing a new machine, or a Socrates smacking his lips over the hemlock.

"Considering all things, I'm agreeable," returned he.

"But no blood of hers is to be shed, no, no, none by you. I want that satisfaction!" said the dwarf, growling, and grinding his teeth, while his fingers resembled the twining snakes once more.

The bandit held out his hands, over his hirer as if he meant to strangle the latter himself, and worked his fingers in emulation of the other, till the four hands were uplifted as it were in burlesque by demons who had witnessed the oath of William Tell and his friends.

"Come along, then, since you understand," said the dwarf, rolling along in advance out of the room, more like a tar on his "sea-legs" than anybody else.

"Understand?" said his satellite, grinning. "May I hang high if I don't. I knife Joaquin (here he laughed queerly), and choke the—a—woman, while you slice her, ha, ha!"

"And we'll attend to the pocket-book afterwards," added he, to himself. "Bleed bank and banker, that's rich!"

* * * * *

Meanwhile, the woman who was the main cause of all this, was with her old serving-woman.

She was somewhat uneasy.

"What do you think of such goings on, Lizzie?" she asked. "Mr. Walters never let a day go by without showing his hideous Tom Thumb figure here, to me. Come, tell me what you think of it."

"I can only say, Miss Laury, that he don't guess how handsome you look to-day, or—"

"Oh, away with such stuff. I might have lived in New York to this day, pampered with every kind of luxury, instead of being out in this rude and barbarous world listening to a jargon about 'gulches,' and 'nuggets,' and 'pockets,' and 'claims,' and the deuce knows what else."

"Then all I can say is, that p'raps the imp—beg your pardon—has smelt a mice with the ugly nose on his monstrous face. Maybe he saw something yesterday that aroused his suspicions—"

"Well, that was all your fault for falling asleep, Liz.

"But no—give the old fellow his due. He was in first rate spirits yesterday, for which I give him credit. But I cannot bear the sight of him.

"Oh, my Mexican is so different.

"But I grow tired of all this medley of mixed wealth and beggary—of mixed luxury and privation. One day drinking champagne out of tin dippers—the next drinking common whiskey out of silver goblets.

"One day you are flattered, feasted, and caressed—the next in danger of your life from slashing bowie knives or flying bullets.

"You are introduced to a fellow dressed like a prince, with silver-mounted saddle and fingers flashing with diamonds; and a few hours after his highness is dangling by the neck from a tree, thanks to the promptitude of Judge Lynch.

"Again, you meet with a man in a red shirt and pilot-cloth pants with a three years' beard on his cheek and chin, and not a single red in his pocket. You treat him with contempt, and find that you have been snubbing a *real* gentleman, by birth, education, manners, and worth."

She was fair enough looking, was the woman who was giving utterance to these snatches of sense, and she gave other evidences of having been well reared and carefully educated in her far away home.

But, alas, she had parted with all that native goodness of heart that she once possessed and was now sunk so low as to be the leman of every adventurer.

"I was saying—what? oh, yes. My monster was in good humor, indeed. He promised me some jewelry, especially a necklace. But neither he nor it will be here to-night, I hope. But my love of a graceful, handsome, gallant bandit will be here—hark! oh! quick! Lizzie, run!"

While the speaker, quite animated now, took one hurried look at the glass, and then sank down on the sofa, which was *the* article of the room's furniture, in a tempting attitude so deeply studied as to seem natural, the servant was away like a rather slow-flying arrow.

When she returned, she followed Senor Valenzuela, whose face was wreathed with smiles.

The old woman took a last survey of the apartment, exchanged a knowing glance with her mistress, and vanished.

If the couple on whom she had just turned her back had not been full of themselves, they would have heard a suppressed sound and a faint scuffle in the passage, and afterwards a growl, which signified in Garcia's vocabulary:

"Valga me Dios! the old hag all but made me a Two-fingered Jack with the one or two fangs she has left. Quiet, you venerable!"

The ancient camerista had run into the very arms of the bandit-in-waiting, and he had almost instantly reduced her to unconsciousness with the pressure round her throat of his vise-like hands.

In the meantime the lovers had bidden and cooed.

"Oh, my dear love of a hero!" sighed Laura, as romantically as a girl of fifteen, "when, oh, when are we to start for San Francisco and the States? I have plenty of money, you have as much, you assure me, let us go there to enjoy ourselves. You can be a Spanish prince; you look it. Won't we lead a life of brilliancy! theatres, moonlight drives, suppers, parties, all the balls, every mortal thing heart can desire!"

The syren looked very handsome.

Her cheeks were suffused with something of the red blushes of her spring time; her eyes danced and sparkled like brilliants; and her superb figure was set off with everything that could display it to the best advantage.

She forced him away with a strength generally to be found in the perfectly formed, a strength which explained why the dwarf required his bravo to hold her while he should deal the blows.

"Joaquin, when we are aboard the steamer, and the coast out of view."

The slight, small Mexican girls were before sufficiently beautiful in the robber's eyes; he had no other kind to contrast with them, so that this lovely woman, with dark brown hair, and dark eyes approaching jet, but of a milk and roses complexion, with a stature equal to his, splendidly rounded, subdued him so that he assented to everything.

And all the while he, the lady-killer, the man experienced in woman's wiles, forsooth, did not dream that little was he to obtain from her, her sole intentions being to attract him to San Francisco, where she would coolly turn over the supposed Joaquin to the authorities.

The reward would nicely pay her passage home, and fit her up in dresses and jewelry, was to make her the belle who always gets the best seat in the cabin, has the captain's telescope, books and conversation, as well as the first help at the table and *the wine of wines*.

"And will not your little man, the *tortilla*, be in a dreadful state?" asked the robber.

"Oh, I suppose so. You ought to see him when he is mad—just like a devil. He stamped around this room like a—I don't know what; oh, he's awful at times. He is quite agreeable by contrast just now, though. He has promised me no end of things, which he will have up from the city. He is rich enough and generous enough, that is true."

"Rich? he ought to be. Why, I've lost several thousand at his very table," said Valenzuela.

"Indeed! Oh, you gamblers! If you could only see my banker when he's in the humor and describes and mimics the faces of the losers and winners. He is impassable as statue."

"As a statue. Never winks as he draws the piles towards him or pushes them away."

"So I believe. Then we'll only be enjoying your own money again, by taking his," said Laura, with a smile that had nothing to do with her words, but which was extremely bewitching nevertheless.

"That is very true, my girl," said Valenzuela. "Has he most of his money here, or does he send it to the States?" continued the robber, who was not so enthralled as to forget the chance there appeared to be of enriching himself with the gambler's hoarded wealth.

"Oh, he has any quantity of gold, in dust, nuggets, and coin, besides heaps of watches and rings, which he loans money on to his customers when they 'get broke'—as they frequently do," replied Laura.

"Is he not afraid of losing all this treasure?"

"But this is dull talking, my girl," said the robber.

"True—true," said Laura. "But I will soon surprise you."

"Surprise me in what manner?"

"You shall soon see the present from my dwarf."

"The present?"

"Yes. I'm promised a necklace of great value, but it hasn't come——"

"Pardon, señorita, here it is!" broke in a rude voice.

The lovers started up, and Valenzuela placed himself before the woman, his knife in his hand.

But he lowered its point almost instantly.

"Jack!" he exclaimed at the height of surprise.

"Yes, Joaquin," returned the bandit.

"What brings you here, of all in the world?"

"I told you. Senorita, here's your necklace!" continued Jack, stretching out his hands most significantly.

She recoiled.

He laughed, and began whispering to his comrade.

"Not a moment to be lost!" cried the latter, thereupon; "pack up your valuables quickly! The banker has paid this man to help kill you and me! Come."

Like one in a dream, the beauty caught up here and there an article, stuffed all into the first little box at hand and while she robed herself, Valenzuela exchanged a few last words with his companion in crime.

Then, the robber, carrying the jewel-box, and the woman ran out of the room, he coolly, she mechanically. Garcia followed them into the entry, but only to lift unseen the body of the stifled woman, and lug it back into the bedroom.

He flung it on the bed, covered it over, tossed a silk scarf of gay colors on the face, and gave the body a severe pinch on the side, which, forcing an instinctive shrinking away, proved that Lizzie was not lifeless.

Next, the robber remembered his trade and, after repairing the disorder caused in the room by the flight, pocketed whatever there was portable and valuable, flung a satisfied look over the place, indulged in what seemed a sudden fit of madness in dancing about and kicking over a chair or two and the table, from which slid the candlestick to be extinguished on the floor.

Then, he pushed out the window, and leant out.

A black ball was beneath, having just escaped the fallen sash.

"Quick!" said Jack, leaning out farther than ever till he caught hold of the dwarf's hands.

The latter was mounted on a gardener's wheelbarrow, standing on which on tiptoe made him about a man's height.

Most unceremoniously, in fact with no more care than the Vigilance Committee's hangman displayed when running their convicts up to the pulley-sheave of the projecting beam of a grain-loft, the Mexican pulled his employer clean through the window into the room.

His haste was compelled by his hearing a choking sob behind him, from the bed, which betokened Lizzie's coming to.

He dropped the dwarf on the floor and crying: "Come, come!" darted at the form just moving the coverlet.

He arrived just in time to smother the woman's voice, for she had recovered consciousness and would have uttered a shrill scream only for Jack's iron gripe.

He merely let her have a little breath, just as an angler gives a fish "play," and hauled her upon the floor completely disguised by the whole of the sheets and counterpanes.

"Quick, sir," said the wretch coolly; "she's lively, and I cannot hold her——"

The monstrosity gave full sweep to his rage.

While the woman suffered for her mistress, groaning, attempting to shriek and writhing horribly, the dwarf plied the dagger, yelling:

"I'm a horrible, disgusting object! I'm worse than a snake! I'm a reptile! I'm a despicable, hateful crawling newt! I'm a—wretch! I—I! ah! Go, shameful thing to find your superior man of a lover! Is he dead, sir?"

"If he ain't, he will be soon," returned Garcia chuckling. "She's a goner, anyhow," pursued he, unclasping his hands from the neck of the muffled woman, a corpse bleeding at fifty gashes now.

"Light up till I see them both!" said the dwarf kneeling down by Lizzie,

and while holding his blood-running blade in one closely clenched hand, he began unfolding the envelopes of the murdered one.

At the same moment that Three-fingered Jack tranquilly hunted up a candle and lit it, he heard the dwarf emit a dreadful howl.

He had touched the face of the dead woman and had naturally been amazed to feel wrinkles and roughness in lieu of Laura's matchless soft and even flesh.

His hair stood on end like a vulture's neck-feathers, and he leaped up and snatched away the candle from the grinning desperado.

"Hell fire! it's the old jade?"

"So it is," said Three-fingered Jack, as tranquilly as possible.

The dwarf turned on him, and brandished his blood-streaked dagger.

"Are you false! where's the dead man?"

"In your shoes, you fool!" roared the Mexican, whose knife was already out.

The candle was flung in his face, as the dwarf followed it in a spring at the bandit's throat.

In the dark the struggle went on.

Suddenly as many as twenty shots rang out, and a shout went up in the same place, outside the house.

"Joaquin the robber! Fire, fire on him!"

"The devil!" exclaimed Garcia, half rising and kneeling on the conquered dwarf, while he searched him. "It was time to finish the little hunchback with a bone (of steel) in his throat. I've the money, anyhow."

He kicked the dwarf upon the other body and listened.

The sounds in the street had continued but went away from the house.

"All right. Valenzuela clear. I hope, with the booty. Good night, loving couple," concluded he laughing as he backed out of the room, casting a farewell look on the two bodies horribly seeming to embrace one another.

When Valenzuela and his beautiful charge made for the front door, they did not progress as fast as they should. Their emotion more than the difficulty of advancing in the dark, had delayed them. Before sallying out, the robber thought to quiet his companion with a warm salute and a cheering word or two. This occupation was so pleasant, that his caution was so lulled and he did not hear the following low-spoken sentences without:

"S'pose it tain't," said one man of nearly a dozen who stood in the street beside the door of the house.

"Oh, shut up, old Careful. I tell you it was Three-fingered Jack who went in here and that proves the old woman is not lying. Joaquin must be in. So use your shooters, I say. You can't hit an honest man in their s'ciety; I guess not! 'Sh! ready, boys!"

The instant Valenzuela opened the door and stepped out, three or four pair of hands lunged at him, and they got a good hold of him before he could shake off his surprise.

He struggled then, but to shake off their grasp was a less easy feat.

Furious at having fallen so blindly into a trap, he fought as only a madman might have been expected to do, or a sane man whose head was doomed to the halter.

He bit, struck, kicked, butted and plunged about in the ring of the dozen men, who had already secured his weapons.

"Give in, you dod-rotted gopher! The woman's sold you!"

"She! the b—"

"No, no!" screamed Laura, who had seen all this occur in a twinkling while unseen herself and nailed to the spot by surprise and terror. "And I'll prove I was true to you, Joaquin!"

When a man lies dying of wound or illness, the woman who little liked him before, has been known to love him then; when he, unthought of before, has

been about to perish, the woman has suddenly been exalted from a passing whim to a do-all, dare-all passion.

So with Laura.

Gay woman as she was, who had determined secretly to sell her plaything for blood-money when it should become tiresome, yet here, with her own idea embodied under her eyes, she hated the too-truthful assertion in one sense, though unfounded in another.

Like a lioness, she burst into the centre of the group and frantically smote and tore at the faces of the men.

Their astonishment aided her purpose, and, panting, bleeding a little, exhausted for the moment, Valenzuela stood comparatively free.

He caught his breath instantly, and wrenched himself from the hands yet on him; true, they were benumbed by the very tenacity of their hold.

Then, as if winged, ignobly forgetting her who had dashed in to save him, he sped up the street towards the end from which no one was running up, as there was from the other.

Out flashed all the fire-arms and the whole group hurried after him, scarcely seeing, such was their desire to secure "Joaquin," that Laura ran amongst them, striking aside this weapon, and that, as she saw them leveled at the fugitive.

She felt her strength failing her; she made a great effort, for all the men had stopped for the same fatal purpose, and darted in advance of them.

She flung herself straight in front of all the barrels and opened her arms to embrace their missiles like Winkelried sweeping in the tyrant's spears.

A rattle of twelve to twenty shots was followed by a mocking cheer from the fugitive bandit vanishing unhurt, and by a many-voiced ejaculation from the marksmen as the smoke curled upwards and showed them a white figure, spotted with red blots growing larger momentarily, stretched on the ground at their feet.

* * * * *

"What's the news, fellows?" said a new comer from down the river, as he slung his leg over his horse's neck and dismounted to saunter into the first saloon, next morning.

"News! the hugest thing yet! what'll you take?" asked the bar-tender, who was missing his own morning call.

"The black bottle, *you* know! quit your joking, Joe!"

"Why, you know Shorty the twistified banker of Hannegan's?"

"I *should* think it! The side-show 'walk in, ladees 'n' gen'l'men 'n' see the smallest living man in the world,' as I allers said he was. Many's the 'slug' his table swallowed of mine. Somebody's 'leaded' him for thumbing a jack?"

"Oh, no! steel. Why, Joaquin and Three-fingered Jack had their gang in town last night about eleven, broke into the dwarf's house, where he's been keeping an all-fired beauty that would make Lola dim beside her—a rosebud in full bloom and a *leettle more*, they say! knifed him and a cook and an old woman, had a fight with a crowd of volunteers and Constable Talbert, and got off on the Di'mons' Spring' road safe, on'y that the beauty was shot in a dozen places. Go down to the court-house and some of the boys you know will let *yer* see her—worth it, I tell you, tho' I ain't been."

And this is the story, which we have truly told.

CHAPTER XVII.

LYING IN WAIT.—STOPPING THE STAGE.—THE CHIEF GAME NOT BAGGED.

SOME time after the failure to assassinate Mr. Fairgrove, on arrival at Diamond Spring, near Hangtown, Joaquin was informed by one of his associates

who kept in the first named place a dance-house, that, on the following morning, the stage between Hangtown and Sacramento would carry, besides the mail and several passengers, a rather large sum of gold-dust destined for the East, *via* San Francisco.

During the opening months of his profession, Murieta had tried his hand at stopping a stage running to or from Mokelumne; but the insignificant result obtained had disgusted him from that Dick Turpin line of his calling, and he had preferred to increase his gains in a different manner.

Still, he did not deem it proper to reject the intelligence given to him and he resolved at all hazards to make himself master of the Hangtown conveyance. Forty thousand dollars, for so went the report, was not a sum to be sneezed at; he wanted no greater one to be enabled to gain Mexico, enrol the forces of which he stood in; need, and enter upon the brilliant plan which he had formed of sacking the lower provinces.

He took Valenzuela and Three-fingered Jack into his confidence and acquainted them with the intention he had of attacking the vehicle: they, eager moreover to wipe out their last defeat, had only been waiting for some new chance.

That very evening they went out along the road to choose a site for the ambush.

After having slowly proceeded through almost the whole night, the three Mexicans stopped at length, in an isolated spot, covered with thick bushes and stunted trees, situated about half way between Mississippi Bar and White Rock House. Joaquin posted his two men on the left of the road, behind a hedge of briars and wild vegetation but near the roadside, while he took up a similarly concealed stand on the right.

Two hours of anxious watch crept slowly on, and already in the east were the first streakings of dawn appearing, and yet there had been no signs of the expected prey.

The chief had had it from a sure source that it was to have set out from Hangtown between one and two of the morning, and yet here it was half after six.

He doubted; his informant must have been mistaken.

He crossed the road to his followers, almost decided to turn back to Diamond Springs and run the risk of meeting the stage in some other place.

Valenzuela and Garcia, their horses' noses rubbing and they themselves as comfortably settled in the saddle as possible, were smoking as they patiently let time pass.

Seeing them so easy, Murieta thought to wait for another hour. But, at the end of fifteen minutes, Three-fingered Jack drew his revolver and began capping it.

"Here it comes!" exclaimed he.

"Yes," said Joaquin, "I hear the wheels. A few words before it comes up. I was so busy with other matters until now that I forgot to tell you what to do."

"Why, Santa Maria!" said Jack, "there ain't two ways of killing the goose. Pistol 'em all and search for—"

"Silence!" broke in the highwayman. "Hark to me: at the first signal, dart out and take each a side of the stage, while I'll stop the horses. I don't want a single cap snapped till my order says so—mind that, Jack! You understand, friends?"

"Perfectly, señor," rejoined Valenzuela, politely bowing.

"All right," growled Garcia, "only I can't say I like the idea—"

"Ready! No more. Remember!"

And as the grating and grinding sound of the wheels grew louder, the captain crossed to his place of concealment. In five minutes afterwards, the object of

their ambush, appeared round a turn in the highway. It was drawn by four horses, who went at a gallop, seeming to be inspired by the fresh early air that they drank in with open nostrils.

In another minute, all were abreast of the hidden highwaymen. Suddenly a peculiar cry arose.

Joaquin shot out from the side of the road and, with a leveled pistol, whose bright steel barrel glittered in the grey light, commanded the halt in a most menacing voice. At the same time, Valenzuela and Three-fingered Jack made their appearance and dashed up to the doorways.

The latter held his pistol so unpleasantly near the occupants that they shrank over to the other side against their companions, who were recoiling likewise from Valenzuela, and were half dead with terror at the Mexican's horrible imprecations.

The driver, on seeing Murieta, had drawn back and pulled up his four-in-hand. He had seen at first blush that it was useless to attempt to dash past, and he could remark, or rather had remarked, that Joaquin did not handle his revolver like a man unused to weapons.

As soon as the stoppage had been completed, the chief exchanged his position for Valenzuela's and took upon himself the delicate occupation of forcing the victims to "deliver."

"Now, gentlemen," said he, looking in on the travelers, more dead than alive, "hand out that box and be quick, for I have no time to lose. Come, make haste!"

"Yes caramba, make haste," echoed Garcia, ferociously, "or I'll make pepper-bottle-tops out of your heads!"

"Bu—but, mister highway—ay—Mister Mexican, I mean—don't be so quick," stammered a fat Englishman filling out a great deal of the back seat and trying to ward off the revolver which Jack kept obstinately pointed at his ear. "By George, there hain't h'any baux heah, I assure yaar!"

"We'd chuck it out mighty quick, if there was," said somebody else.

"Yes, yes," chorussed the other travelers, "there isn't any box whatever, large or small," repeated they, drawing in against one another, till they were like red herrings in a case, from the ominous sextuple muzzles of the revolver.

"Driver, where's the dust you're taking to Sacramento?" demanded Joaquin, furiously.

"There's not a grain of gold, sir, in the coach. Yesterday, we carried a big iron-bound chest to Sacramento, but this trip, nary box."

"I'll see, first, and if you're lying, look out!"

"I'll be d—d if you'll find any, hunt as you like, sir," said the driver.

Joaquin flung open the door, while Jack did the same on the other side, and cried:

"Out of this, every one of you!"

The order was quickly executed.

Two of those on Garcia's side made a little delay, when he caught one by the collar and pulled him through in so unceremonious a fashion that the other leaped out as lightly as a dancer.

The last was a young woman, of Mexican origin no doubt, who had not been noticed before by the chief.

She threw back her shawl and held out to him a little crucifix of gold set with diamonds, which he, after having taken and examined it, returned with some compliment quite in the ancient highwaymen's vein.

After having minutely examined the interior, without having been able to discover anything whatever, Joaquin climbed upon the roof and looked at the boot but there was no treasure there unless the ends of useless whip-lashes and spare buckles and straps are accounted precious.

So Murieta, cursing his ill fortune, ordered the travelers to retake their

places, after paying him for *their* trouble, and called off Valenzuela as a token of his permission being given to the driver to go ahead.

He let out his whip, and off went the four horses at a gallant pace.

Three-fingered Jack, on hearing the order and seeing the stage started, wheeled and sent a couple of bullets over the top of the dust-enveloped vehicle at the head of the driver, who was not touched luckily.

With angry look and gesture, the captain commanded the treacherous miscreant to put up his weapon, or else he would slay him on the spot.

"He ought to have carried the box of gold to-day!" growled Jack, as if he were stating a most conclusive reason for his action.

Joaquin could not help laughing.

The three hastened back to Diamond Springs, to the house of their friend, whose ears were gratified by an account of the exploit and his eyes by the sight of the pretty well-filled pocket-books and money-belts which had been taken from the travelers.

For a whole week, the highwaymen dwelt in concealment in their friend's house and, when the noise caused by the stopping of the stage had diminished, they mounted their horses, which had been kept in a sure place, and directed their steps still again to Sonora Pass.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FIVE FRENCH.—ARKANSAW TURNS UP AGAIN.—CHINESE.—THE BEAR AND THE BATHIERS.—GARCIA AND THE GRIZZLY.—THE HUNT.

A SHORT time after their departure from Diamond Spring the chief and his comrades established a temporary camp on the northern branch of the Stanislaus River.

The place had appeared to them on the previous evening to be utterly apart from human habitation.

But, when they arose at the break of dawn they were surprised to behold at a little distance an encampment of several men, who were guessed correctly to be French.

The latter did not suspect in the least what undesirable neighbors they had, and were quite ignorant of the true trade of the new-comers.

When the latter appeared before them and asked them what was their business in so out-of-the-way a place, they answered without any hesitation that they were gold-seekers.

"So are we," remarked Joaquin, "we're gold-seekers and are very eager to make a rause of the dust, if it is possible hereabouts."

"Ah, but it is ver' possible," replied the apparent principal of the party. "The place is excellent, gold here abounds. But," added he in his best English, "you have not of *outils*—vat you name—ah! too-els for to work?"

"Oh! you're a little out there—we are well supplied; but are you sure the diggings pay?"

"Perfectly! Believeey-vous that four or five men like us would muse ourselves in working for nothig? No, no! We have found what you call some good deegin's, and we are well decided to dwell the longest time possible in this gran-n-nd raypublick!"

"You are likely to dwell in it longer than you fancy," said Joaquin, suddenly drawing his revolver; "but you won't *live* in it long enough to improve your excellent English," added he, while his companions displayed their weapons, "unless you turn over to us every particle you possess!"

"Holy heaven! name of a saint! mon Dieu Lord!" ejaculated the Gauls.

On seeing the menacing attitude of the Mexicans, they could not hope for joke to be before them. Four of the five ran to their tents and re-appeared the next moment, revolver in hand, but, before they had time to take aim, Jack, Three-fingers and Valenzuela had fired two or three shots a-piece and slain them.

The last of the unfortunates entreated mercy, but, hardly had he given up several pounds of gold dust, the fruits of long toil, than he was killed pitilessly like his fellows.

As unconcernedly as possible, the murderers sat down to the breakfast of the Frenchmen, whose blood had scarcely ceased to flow.

While they were thus busied, they were abruptly interrupted by a loud shout.

They looked straight before them and beheld, on the other bank of the stream, ten men, all on horseback, and armed with revolvers and rifles, the foremost of them being the everlasting Arkansaw."

"That Yankee again!" exclaimed Joaquin, on foot at the moment. "Quick, quick, to horse!"

Jack growled like a dog from whom a bone was being taken, and was only quickened in his movements by two bullets buzzing near him and a third denting a tin plate which he was just about reaching for.

He flew into the saddle like the others, at that, cursing the Americans in general and "Arkansaw and his crowd" in particular.

"Caramba! to spoil a man's meal," grumbled he. "Here's the time to wait for them and pitch into them."

"Of course, it is," said Murieta sarcastically, "when they are three to one and with rifles, too. I tell you, you may look upon yourself as very well off that they haven't done for one or two of us, as it is. Fools for having given us warning!"

"There they are crossing the stream. They'll be over soon. Push on," said Valenzuela.

He plied the spurs simultaneously and placed himself so as to cover his chief, while Garcia galloped on in the rear, enraged at having to turn his back on the hated foe.

Hardly had they gained the summit of the nearest eminence, than they came upon a couple of Chinese who were carrying their mining implements on their shoulders and were without other weapons than a couple of U. S. cavalry sabres, condemned and probably sold to them cheap at San Francisco, or bought on the way from a deserting soldier.

Three-fingered Jack flung himself off his horse and on them not only poignarding them but cutting off, their heads which he slung by the hair towards the pursuers.

Five miles further on, other Chinese were met, and the same act was each time repeated, so that seven heads and seven trunks were passed by the Americans, almost witnesses of the crimes without power to prevent them.

During four days, the bandits continued to fly until, after the chasers were probably shaken off they made for Sonora Pass.

On the last of another four-and-twenty hours, they reached the head-quarters.

They dismounted without announcing their return by the signal agreed upon, and, while Jack led the horses to water to the neighboring pond, Joaquin and Valenzuela advanced towards the camp. When at the first tent, they halted and saw three of their comrades deep in the mysteries of the fifty-two leaves of the Satanic prayer-book.

They were so absorbed in their games that they did not in the least notice the coming of their officers.

"This is nice!" said Joaquin sternly, "immense resistance you could offer the Yankees, I don't think!"

Immediately the players, dropping their "hands," like sleepers suddenly awakened, sprang to their feet and drew their revolvers, and, seeing whom they were that they had to do with, they tried to laugh it off, and wished their superiors a hearty welcome.

"Carajo!" said one, "the devil fly away with me if I didn't think the Yankees had the camp!"

"Which they might easily do," rejoined Joaquin, looking around on the whole camp, then quite deserted; "yes, without the least difficulty, with all possible ease. Where are the men?"

"Out a hunting grizzly."

"Are the ladies hunting, too?"

"Oh, no, captain. They strolled off towards the rivulet, and are under some tree, I suppose."

"Very well; I will go myself and see what has become of them. Stay here, Valenzuela, and if the men come back before I do, put some of them on guard on every point where you may think a sentry is needed. Those cursed fellows are fully capable of not being thrown off our trail, for all our trouble, and popping in upon us of a sudden."

"That is to be feared, señor," said Valenzuela, "and we must prevent their kind visit, for the sake of the señoritas, at any rate. In case the rest of the boys are not back in a quarter of an hour, I will put these three here on the point furthest west of the mountains and go myself to attend to the pass."

Joaquin approved of this idea, and, trusting all to the lieutenant, sauntered off to find the girls.

On coming to the pond, while keeping himself behind a clump of saplings, he perceived them merrily bathing under the shade of some trees, hanging on to the pendant branches and gracefully swimming.

As they were not unaware that the men might pass by at any time, they had taken the precaution, in remembrance of past shamefulness, to attire themselves in habits, which prevented the eavesdropper from a treat as delightful as that of years ago in which Clarina and himself were the respective entertainer and entertained.

In the woods, there was only a gentle murmur broken now and anon by the whizzing of a fly-catcher's wings, or the "whit-er-wheel" of a quail.

Joaquin was waiting, calculating the effect which he would produce by an unexpected presence among the bathers, enjoying their alarm and confusion in anticipation, when a piercing scream, preceding many others, came upon his ear.

Hardly had he heard the first, seemingly uttered by Clarina, than he sprang out of his covert; but the danger was passed already.

He only rushed upon the spot to see Three-fingered Jack plunging his knife into the belly of a good sized grizzly.

Jack, after tending to the horses, had left the harness on the ground and laid down in the bushes, not far from the sheet of water in which the robbers' naiads were disporting.

Calmer than usual and affected more deeply than he would have supposed possible by the peacefulness round about, he fell off into a half slumber, dreaming while he dozed.

His thoughts turned back to many years before when he had been young and unused to crime.

His remembrances of a woman whom he had loved, had a stamp put upon them by his hearing faintly a clear sweet voice of a woman.

It awoke him and, still half-roused only, he staggered out of the thicket, when a scream made him fully conscious and led him to save from the clutches of the bear the mistress of his chief.

On beholding the animal, he had thrown himself between it and the flying

woman, and ~~surp~~ his blanket over its head, following up the momentary check by savage stabs; he was dealing the last stroke when his captain appeared.

Clarina was following her companions, who were fleeing in all haste from the scene of terror, but, at the sight of her lover, she stopped, turned and ran to throw herself into his arms, explaining to him all that had happened.

Joaquin, without even thinking of asking how the brave rescuer had chanced to be there so opportunely, shook his hand, still wet with blood as it was, and warmly expressed his gratitude.

"Garcia," said he, "you have saved a life dear to me. I am made your debtor henceforth by that; I am your devoted friend, remember."

For the first time during many long years, a smile lit up the face, impassive and almost always ferocious, of Three-fingered Jack, the merciless bandit who, under the flimsy cloak of revenging the death of his mistress, had committed no end of horrible crimes.

"It's nothing to tumble over a bear," he said. "No use making a fuss about it. And anyhow, if I did save the señorita from harm, it was more than anything else from my thinking of another."

"Another what?"

"Woman. What will you say when I tell you that my presence here was from a dream of the past."

As soon as the speech was uttered, without adding another syllable, he turned his back unceremoniously on the bandit chief and his mistress, and dived into the shade.

"Garcia in love, as he seems to mean!" exclaimed Joaquin, in spite of himself. "Really, if he had not just now rendered me a service beyond value, I would be tempted to make him the laughing stock of the whole band."

"Perhaps," said Clarina, "his speech contains some mystery of which we know nothing. He seemed to be referring to the past, mentioning the memory of a woman."

"At all events, there is something strange in it," concluded the captain, "but he is not soap or sugar to melt. Come, we must return to camp—unless you prefer to visit a certain tree—"

"Tree, Joaquin?"

"Why, yes, dear Clarina. Oh, don't you fancy that I haven't yet seen the pretty little bower you have tastefully formed since I've been away. The canopy of creepers, the flowers on the sides, our initials woven with evergreen in a garland—I know all. I was not back twenty minutes before love guided me to the spot."

"So I lose the pleasure of surprising you. But you do not—ah! holy Mother, what's that?"

A dull crash, made by some heavy body in motion through the chapparal, sounded out near the couple. An instant after, another bear, but smaller than the former one, rattled with his claws on the carpet of rotten twigs and leaves past Joaquin and his mistress. As the former tried to shake off Clarina, who clung to him tenaciously, half a dozen of the desperadoes burst through the brush at very nearly the same time, weapon in hand, hurrah'd on by Manuel Guerra.

"Halt!" cried he, on perceiving his superior.

The robbers obeyed and, no less astonished than joyous, pressed around to welcome him.

"You've made short-work of our bruin, captain," remarked Guerra, indicating the carcase of the grizzly.

"No, no," answered Joaquin. "That is not your fellow—it is some of Three-fingered Jack's hunting."

"Caramba!" swore the lieutenant, "so ours has escaped? I thought we had him sure when I saw this one."

At the same moment, twenty or thirty detonations exploded around in the underwood. Joaquin and those who had met him hurried to the camp, where all were united in four or five minutes, for the remainder of the hunters had slain the second grizzly in the very heart of the head-quarters.

CHAPTER XIX.

RETURN OF THE RAVAGERS.—AN ORGIE.—SEVALIO NEARLY HANGED.

TOWARDS the evening of this day, so gloriously marked by the killing of the two bears, Valenzuela and the three men who held the outposts, came into camp. Behind them marched about fifty of their companions, who had been separately marauding in different parts of the State. The commander of each detachment gave over to the chief an account and the product of each expedition ; the amount of the whole plunder went as high as a thousand ounces of gold. While the new-comers related to their friends what they had done, the first who had arrived made everything ready for a grand feast, which was to end in a general fandango.

The great fire was kindled in the centre of the encampment, for the roasting of the grizzlies slain so opportunely. This was to be the chief dish, plenty of provisions, brought by the robbers, was to supply the other demands. Ere long the cooks announced supper to be ready.

A truce was declared to conversation, and all took their places. The feast was not let cool, for everybody had had their appetite whetted by the various emotions of the day. After that, cigarettes and favorite drinks of the Mexicans went the round, and attention was given to the stories of such of the crew as could rattle off a relation of adventures, highway or amorous. When almost all subjects had been exhausted which could interest the assemblage, Joaquin turned towards Antonio, who had been rather silent since the commencement, and he begged him to say something.

“Heaven knows, my friends,” said Antonio, flinging away the end of a cigar, “that it is utterly impossible for me to recount my experiences for the last quarter of an hour even, seeing that my head is full as an egg of visions of grizzly bear. I was almost asleep and actually dreamed of one of the monsters being about to let me have a left hander with those sweet teeth he carries out of fun at the end of his feet! Thank you, captain, for awaking me. However, if such a thing as a song poorly sung can replace the story I am called upon to give, I will be happy to be agreeable to you, besides it’s driving the bear from my mind.”

“Yes, yes, a song!” exclaimed several voices.

“Well, what do you speak for?” inquired Antonio. “The Castle of Saint Anna, or the Serenade of Mount Sierra? or—”

“Give us ‘Our land of lands is Mexico,’ ” said Valenzuela.

“Willingly; but you must take care and join in the chorus lustily. It’s a jolly good bit, which Padre Jurata preferred to anything else, and he had a good ear for hymns; but it is not much unless the chorus is sung heartily.”

“Enough, friend. Fire away!”

After the usual coughs to clear his throat, Antonio plunged feelingly into the following ballad to the air of “The Pretty Maid of Monterey.”

OUR LAND OF LANDS IS MEXICO.

Gay and free hunters
Of men and of gold,
Our arms are right strong,

Joaquin, (the Claude Duval of California);

Our hearts true and bold ;
 O'er prairies, through woods,
 Up mountain, down vale ;
 Our horses our ships,
 Oh ! swiftly we sail !

CHORUS.

They shudder in placers,
 A cloud shades the land,
 The miners pale to see us—
 The Mexican Band !

Our bullets drive deep
 In Englishmen's hearts,
 The French of our knives
 Feel the blade's sharp parts ;
 The Yankee swings high
 By lasso from branch,
 The light in his eyes
 The flames of his ranch !

They shudder, &c.

Pleasure or peril
 To either we run,
 We fight or we sport,
 By star or by sun,
 When the angelus' bells,
 On the cool night sing,
 We gather the spoils
 And dance in the ring.

They shudder in placers,
 For blood stains the sand,
 While rejoices with spoil
 The Mexican Band !

“Yes, yes,” cried Antonio, “we are the Mexican Band, and we will be still more worthy of the name when our captain is enabled to begin his plan. Long life to Mexico ! the land of the Cactus forever ! it's the only place in all creation, my lads, except Spain and Italy, where one can pass at ease through a really pleasant existence.”

“Why, have you ever seen those countries ?” inquired Valenzuela.

“Both, certainly,” was Antonio's reply. “I was born in Madrid, to begin with, and as for Italy, I may boast that I wasn't the worst brigand in the party that followed the goat-skin jacket of the celebrated Carlotti !”

“Hullo ! did you know Giovanni Carlotti ?” exclaimed Guerra.

“A little. Signor Giovanni Carlotti, the grandson of the one who was second of the world-known Captain Alessandro Massaroni. But, comrades, I will relate my history some other day, I am out of breath for the present.”

“Here, Antonio,” said Joaquin, pouring out from a bottle near him some splendid wine, which California with its universal climate, promises to equal some day ; “take a sip of this to refresh your mellifluous throat ! Fill up, every man of you, and let us drink to the memory of brave Mazzaroni, the valiant captain who said :

“Short and wise is our motto : Let money be the first of all things. Cowardice alone is a crime. For the rest, let every mother's son of you do what you please. Time's like a bird which is off on the wing and cannot be retained or pulled back. It is easy for one to console himself if haste is made to enjoy what he has.”

Loud acclamation greeted the chief's speech ; the glasses chinked merrily, and the toast to one of the prides of the Italian highway was uproariously quaffed by these rangers of El Dorado.

"Hush!" said Joaquin suddenly ; "I thought I heard a signal."

"Yes, yes," returned Valenzuela. "There are some of our comrades returned, and if I am not mistaken, it was Sevalio's call, wasn't it, Margarita ? Before ten minutes passes over our heads, you will have your lover by your side."

"I can't tell," answered the Mexican girl ; "you appear to know the signal better than I."

The chief pulled out of his breast a silver whistle which he put to his lips.

A piercing sound vibrated around.

Some few minutes afterwards, the feasters saw Sevalio appear, followed by two more men, who led their horses by the bridle.

The three were so broken by fatigue that anybody would have taken them from their dragging gait, to have been patients fresh discharged from a hospital.

Joaquin went to meet them, with Antonio and Valenzuela, while the whole band rose to bid them welcome and to make room for them by the fire.

"What news, Sevalio ?" inquired the bandit leader, when the lieutenant and his men were seated.

"Stay, captain, stay ! And, comrades, pass us some wine quick, for we are half dead !"

Five or six bottles were instantly handed to the new-comers, and truth obliges us to state that they took more than was good for them.

"Now, captain," said Sevalio, encircling with one arm the waist of his mistress, who had come to sit beside him, "now I am ready to answer you, but I must open fire by announcing that my tidings are bad. I think even that it would be as well to put them off till to-morrow, if you don't want to becloud the merry-making."

"No, no," replied the commander, "we must know this evening, uncertainty is never agreeable. Tell us all that has happened to you. I see that you bring back only two out of the whole company of nine that you started off with. Are the rest dead ?"

"Alas, yes. Dead and buried, I hope."

"How ?"

"Two fell in fair fight ; the others——"

"Go on, the other five——"

"Were hanged ! strung up like jerked beef. Dangling on trees ! curse trees ! Another bottle, comrades. Let me drink down the remembrance of the scene. I think I feel the rope round my neck yet !"

"What ! around your neck ?" queried Joaquin.

"Around my neck, and the slip noose was drawn d—nably tight, as they dragged me along to the tree, when I got my hands loose, I can't tell how, and streaked for the bush where these two friends were hid, and away we went with half a hundred bullets flying around us. Caramba ! the Yankees are more savage than Apaches, they're h— when quiet, but when irritated, stand from under ! More wine, boys ! Holy Cross, these Yankees don't do things by half generally, and I'm glad I am the exception. They won't even be satisfied with what would be enough for others. When hanging is the work, they want to run a man up higher than any other people in the world would think of doing. I suppose I am left to avenge my poor strangled friends."

"It is to be hoped," was the general opinion.

"Where did the bad luck befall you ?" asked Guerra.

"At the branch of the Rio de las Plumas, Feather River, just fifteen miles from Spanish Peak. There was a company of miners there, from eighty to a hundred, whom I'll go bail for being the roughest savages in the state. You ought to have seen how they were armed, real walking batteries, carajo !

Every one of them had three or four pistols or revolvers, a rifle and a knife as big as a machete."

"Well," interposed Antonio, "now that you have told us how the affair finished, we won't be sorry to learn how it commenced."

"I'm willing; here it is," said Sevalio.

CHAPTER XX.

SEVALIO'S ADVENTURES. — THE ATTACK.—ARKANSAW'S DEFEAT. — RANGING THE BATTLE-FIELD.—RIVALRY.

"A few days after we quitted Red Bluffs," said Sevalio, who was at his fourth bottle, "we reached Shasta, where we had the luck of meeting a train of mules carrying gold. We stopped it a couple of miles from the town, took the treasure and the back trail to Red Bluffs, each of us carrying twelve pounds of the spoil. You may believe that we did not let the grass grow under our feet on the road to head-quarters.

"The men whose goods we had taken were miners and we expected on that account to be pursued very quickly.

"As we were finishing supper in Pedro's eating-house and about to be off, Pedro warned us that we were watched and that if we did not make haste to flee without being seen, we would run the risk of being hanged if only by suspicion.

"There was nothing tempting in such a prospect, and we hurried to clear off, but separately and in different directions, our general rendezvous to be Oroville.

"A numerous set of Germans, French and Yankees were at our heels, and we only gave them the slip at Downieville. To make up for that, we gave chase to four Americans in the valley of Lake Wey, and, catching them there, we left them life in exchange for their money.

"It was in returning from the lake that we were attacked by the Feather River miners.

"Two of our men were slain outright, while the enemy had five knocked over.

"My two here and myself got off, as you know.

"We remained three days in the brush, eating and drinking nothing for the very reason that we were out of all necessaries, and then we risked going out to make for Sonora Pass. Ten miles or so out of Downieville, we buried the gold, ran off a horse a-piece and—and here we are."

"There is nothing very gay in that report," observed Joaquin; "but we must expect to turn up a low card once in a while. Pass around the bottle, comrades, and let's have a lively time of it, while we may."

"Yes, yes, captain, you are right," said Sevalio, "I agree with you there. Lopez, my friend, let's have a bottle or two, for, by all the saints and saintesses in paradise, I'm weak as water yet! The gallop along the precipices does play a man out, I tell you!"

"Along the precipices," echoed Antonio. "Did you lose the way?"

"Not at all, but we took the worst way by the highlands to give the pursuers a bellyful of rackriding."

"So you were chased, eh? Come, Sevalio, explain in the fiend's name."

"What, didn't I tell you all about it? The Yankees were behind us when we dashed through the pass by Lake Mono; they rushed us into the mountains and when we threw them off the track, I don't believe they were more than five miles from us."

"The duece!" exclaimed the chief, springing instantly to his feet, "this is serious. If only that little bit divided you, they'll only need the glimmer of our big fire here to show them the rest of the road."

"Hush!" interrupted Valenzuela suddenly, "that sound can be only spurs jingling on the rocks! Still?"

All listened.

"I hear, too," said Murieta, drawing his revolver. "Up, comrades, to arms! Antonio! take thirty or forty men and place them on the rocks commanding the left side of the pass. I'll see to the right with the rest. Come on, men, but softly, for we must not leave one of the spoil-sports to tell the tale."

The bandits, faithful to the recommendation just given, followed their respective leaders and noiselessly ascended the piles of stone overlooking the entrance.

Each did his best to hide his advance by the ruggedness of the ground.

Meanwhile, the sound of steps approaching became more and more distinct.

Every now and then, there was to be heard a savage imprecation of some of the storming party, who had stumbled or slipped on the moss.

They came into view but slowly on account of the labor required by the advance.

About twenty feet below the place where Joaquin awaited, the tall, stalwart form of Arkansaw rose up, leading no less than forty rough-looking men, armed to the teeth.

"Deuce take me if I fancy this location!" growled Arkansaw.

He had barely spoken than from every split in the rocky wall before them, a jet of fire issued and the air was filled with smoke and shook with the crash of sixty or seventy shots.

Half that number of the assailants dropped dead, or fell back desperately injured.

"Up, up the rock!" cried Arkansaw, whose hat had been blown heaven knows where; "away you go! hands and teeth! It's the only chance, boys—close in!"

The survivors did begin to climb up the rampart sheltering the banditti, but the one or two who did contrive to mount pretty high, had only the greater distance to fall.

A second discharge no less deadly than the former, made the wall tremble and down dropped the attacking party, dying or dead. Some of the robbers ran instantly to camp and returned with torches.

Then the scene appeared in all its horror.

Nothing could be more frightful than the livid countenances illumined by the flickering and ruddy glare of the resinous brands.

Joaquin himself could not remain long before such a sight, he hastened away to see no more of the awful eyes, staring in death.

His men who were less impressionable, removed the valuables and weapons of the defeated, while taking heed to finish those who still breathed.

The most indefatigable in this latter task was the vindictive Sevalio, who seemed to have conceived the idea of out-heroding Three-fingered Jack.

The latter, as if that idea had struck him, kept watching him all the time; his piercing sight, rendered more horrible than usual by an accompanying smile of hideousness, followed every movement of his companion; Jack seemed to be finding pleasure in seeing the latter cutting off the heads of the corpses or churning his dagger in the bodies.

"By the soul of Padre Jurata," swore Garcia, "this night you've robbed me of half my fun, Senor Sevalio, but it doesn't matter so long as you do not become too formidable a rival. When that happens, look out for snakes, old fellow!"

As he swung in air his flambeau to make it burn better, the light flooded

both their faces, while Jack darted on Sevalio a glance, half in sardonic sport half in earnest, before he went off to examine more of the fallen with the eagerness of hunting up an acquaintance.

All the other desperadoes had gone back to the encampment, so that Garcia was alone in his blood-thirstiness on the battle-field.

Holding the torch in one hand and in the other his knife, he tranquilly pursued his scrutiny lowering the light every few moments to take a closer look at a blood-bespattered visage, when a noise made him glance around and see Sevalio once more.

"Oh, you is it?" growled Jack. "I thought it was a grizzly who had smelt out the banquet."

"What keeps you here?" inquired the other, with a grin.

"Somebody not to be found, I'm afraid."

"Whom?"

"Why, the leader of these fools who ran their heads into the lions' jaws. If he's got off this time, I'll have to believe the devil is his friend."

"The leader of these cursed Yankees is a prisoner in the camp, along with one other."

"Caramba! who went and spared him?"

"Murieta; and I came to tell you he wants to see you first thing."

"Oh, ho! come along! I'm impatient to see the rough customer, who shan't slip me this time as before."

When the two returned to the gathering, they found the whole band seated around the fires which had been raked together and made again, and rejoicing over the victory so easily purchased.

Wine was circulating anew and the drinkers were more untiring in disposing of libations than before.

The two prisoners, bound tightly with the red silk sashes of their captors, were lying on the ground, talking together most bitingly of their conquerors and paying no attention to frequent threats for them to "dry up;" they were trying to hasten their execution.

"Friend Garcia," began Joaquin, as soon as the three-fingered butcher had thrown himself down at ease on the grass, "I want you and Sevalio to draw lots to see who shall have the pleasure of killing one of these two."

"Which—the chief?" asked Jack eagerly.

"No; the other. I mean to keep the principal for a few days."

"But he may escape," pleaded the Mexican; "I may as well drive the nail into his chest!"

All laughed, while the speaker drew out his knife, only half cleaned, and fixed his fiery gaze on his enemy.

"Ha, ha!" cried Arkansaw tauntingly, "who's a-scart? You dassent give a man a fair sight! Bah, you dirty yellow-bellies, you greasers of Satan's kitchen, I'll take any three, any five of you together! There! pah, you cowardly mongrels!"

"No!" thundered Joaquin, as Garcia offered to spring upon the defier, "I say 'no!' I have my reasons for sparing him; you must wait."

"Very well, I'll be satisfied with him. Let Sevalio have his own way with the other. I don't feel that way inclined just now, anyhow."

A low gasp was audible. Sevalio had drawn his knife across the throat of Arkansaw's companion.

"A simple matter," remarked the slaughterer, returning to sit beside Garcia and halve a bottle with him.

"Very simple, indeed," added Valenzuela; "nothing could be more simple, but it was done with a relish that friend Jack must appreciate."

"Now, comrades," cried Antonio suddenly, "let's have one song more.

Why, we're all as stupid as gophers in the sierra's snow. Are you asleep, every one of you?"

The lieutenant's desire was not answered.

The copious draughts which the human casks had poured into themselves had taken the wits out of all heads, and four-fifths of the troop were sound asleep. The rest were not slow to follow the example, and the feast terminated in a chorus of snoring which the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus might have envied.

CHAPTER XXI.

ARKANSAW DISAPPEARS.—"NO QUESTIONS ASKED."—MURDERS.—THE CHASR.

TEN o'clock in the morning had scarcely come, when Joaquin aroused his men, and ordered them to strike tents and break up camp.

Although surprised at the sudden resolution and very much preferring a day's rest to activity, all obeyed without hesitation and, before the sun had marked noon, the whole band was leaving Mono Lake behind and proceeding toward Sonora Pass.

Arkansaw was not with the troop.

An hour or so before the departure, Three-fingered Jack, who could not let the first opportunity for revenge pass by, had slain, without a word to anybody the man who had promised to defeat him in the previous contest.

Joaquin gave no token of having noticed his lieutenant's cold-blooded act, for what could be done, short of death, to a man so dreadfully cruel? He preferred to say nothing, and feigned to have forgotten the prisoner.

In any event, he was not very much distressed at what had happened, though he had reserved the captive for a peculiar tit-bit in the way of torture: he meant to make him, after the Indian style, a living target for his men.

On coming to the south fork of the Tuolumne River, Murieta formed his troop into detachments of twelve or fifteen, which were to go to Arroyo Cantuva by different routes.

He himself, leaving the females to the charge of Antonio and Guerra, selected fifteen stout fellows and took the road for Coulterville, by the south-east.

On the way from Don Pedro Bar to Snelling's, he fell in with three Frenchmen, two Germans and as many Americans, who were driving pack-mules laden with provisions, blankets and mining tools.

He did not hesitate to stop them and, while his gang stood ready by his side to shoot at the first word, he strode up to one of the Frenchmen, who did not make use of his firearms, took him by the collar and summoned him to point out where the money-bag was put.

The man stammered and spoke slowly in order to give his friends the time to offer resistance, which they did gallantly, but the banditti had been too quick for them and shot the three principals who resisted at first fire.

Joaquin, annoyed at opposition being shown to him, flourished his dagger and threatened to have every one of the survivors' throats cut if they did not immediately turn over their gold to him.

They resigned themselves to their fate, and, drawing from under the blankets a canvas bag, presented it to the captain, assuring him that it was the sum total of all their exertions.

The contents amounted to four hundred dollars.

Murieta continued his journey thereupon, despite the entreaties of Three-fingered Jack, who wanted to finish the German and the French left, and ordered the latter to move on in their own way.

They did not require a renewal of the command, for the very good reason that, if the highwayman had made a more careful examination of their baggage —he would have found six more bags just like the one he had taken, containing in all about five-and-twenty thousand dollars worth of gold dust.

After this robbery, the committers of it crossed the Merced River at Snelling's, and turned to the east to gain Mariposa. A couple of miles from Mount Ophir, Joaquin was obliged to interfere to prevent Three-fingered Jack from slaying a luckless Chinese, who was so sick and poverty-stricken that the bandit leader was thus affected.

In a few hours more, they entered Mariposa, two by two, though, for otherwise suspicions would have been excited.

They stayed there a week, having a good time in spending the booty lately acquired. Then, they left the place, crossed the Mariposa River, and the Chow-chilla.

At ten or twelve miles from Coarse Gold Gulch, four Russian miners were met and killed and robbed.

Several Indians, who had witnessed the affair, after the departure of those who had taken the lion's share, came in for the pickings and stripped the corpses of their garments.

Being found some time afterwards in possession of the goods, they were pointed out to some Russians, friends of the murdered, and made to expiate the crime of Murieta and his command.

The latter had already gone over the San Joaquin, about twenty-five miles above Fort Miller, after having laid over for two or three days at an Indian village for a rest; thence, once again on the march, the morning of the third day had seen them at Arroyo Cantuva, where the majority of their fellows, previously arrived, were completing the putting up of tents.

Joaquin, set at ease by Arkansaw's death, had decided to dwell once more in the old retreat, more commodious and safer than any other.

When all was settled in the encampment, the plunderers reposed for a whole fortnight, at the end of which they were started off in more or less numerous bodies and with varied missions to perform.

It was necessary to obtain money and horses somewhere and also to keep the men employed, while at the same time information and profit were procured.

Chiefs of such bands of marauders are often placed in the situation of the well-known lottery-player who drew the elephant; if it cannot keep itself, good bye to any peace to the owner.

When all the divisions were off to accomplish their instructions, Joaquin was left with only a dozen men, among whom figured Antonio, Sevalio and Guerra.

Murieta and this handful spent a month very agreeably in eating, drinking, sleeping, smoking, making love and hunting in the mountains.

The rainy season had by this time come on, which, everywhere unpleasant, was peculiarly so in the highlands. Here the captain of ravagers decided to take the field in person and find a site favorable for the execution of the plans on which he had set his mind.

Two days afterwards, he directed his steps towards the north of the state, accompanied by Sevalio, who was to show him the gold buried by him and his companions on the bank of Feather River.

After several short halts at Mariposa, Sonora, Murphy's, Mokelumne Hill, Jackson, Drytown, Ragtown and Fiddletown, the leader and his lieutenants arrived at Hangtown.

They opened performances by the unromantic act of having a good supper in one of the eating-houses; after which Sevalio went away on horseback while his master entered a dance-house, where he was quickly surrounded by some pretty Chilian girls, belonging to the establishment.

Joaquin carried himself with so much gracefulness and attractiveness that he had many dances with the charmers. When he could believe that he had the right to repose a bit, he went and sat down between a couple of the frail beauties and chatted on all the topics on which such ignorant hirelings could converse.

The sound of this tri-ologue and the laughter of the women very soon attracted the attention of all upon the three, and the careless Joaquin recovered some gravity on perceiving that he was examined most searchingly by some Americans, who seemed to be keeping the door intentionally.

In a few moments, he recognized in one of them the driver of the stage which he had stopped near White Rock House; for the man's part, the astonishment depicted on every one of his features at such fool-hardiness proved that he had known the highwayman again.

Without "discovering," as chess-language does, the least fear or even mere uneasiness, which would have been ruinous, the robber-king rose with the greatest serenity, wished the girls a good night, rolled his cloak around him and went out. At the door, a hand lightly touched him.

"Excuse me, sir, but I'd like to see you," said a voice.

Murieta had already sprang upon his horse, which had been left tied up before the door of the next house.

"Well, replied he," mimicking the speaker, "you *do* see me, and you ought to be satisfied with having seen me for the last ten minutes."

And away his spurred horse took him round the first corner. After a swift ride, during which he had got over fifteen miles, he reached Junction House where he put up his steed and spent the whole night, supposing with reason that no chase would be begun of him before morning.

At peep of day, he galloped off to Taylor's Ranch, with the intention of tracing a semi-circle and arriving at Fiddletown in time to meet Sevalio.

He did not go at a very severe pace now, for he reckoned considerably on the confusion which would be among the Hangtowners. He was passing the ranch when he heard in his rear the hoofs of many horses and caught sight before long of a good number of well-armed horsemen coming after him.

The one first look was all that was required to inform him what was to be expected.

He gave the reins to his horse, which flew away as with wings of the wind. The pursuers pressed on, with many an oath of the whites and many a whoop like a redskin, but in this race the Mexican, born in the saddle, as one may say, kept his lead. Rejecting his first idea, Joaquin turned abruptly towards the south-east and entered upon the mountainous country, very certain that there the followers could make nothing by superior speed, at least.

The treacherous nature of the soil rendered his own progress more difficult than he had believed at first. More than once, in toiling up excessively steep ascents, his horse had gone down on its knees, fortunately lightly, and as many times, in descending, it had slid along on its drooped haunches from its hoofs slipping and ploughing up the red clay.

At the base of one of the hillocks ran a rock-lined gully, in the depths of which rolled a little torrent, on the way to add heaven knows what incalculable treasures in its foam to the American River.

It was a very dangerous place for the best cavalier on the freshest steed to attempt to traverse and Murieta hesitated to take the leap; but seeing the foremost of his hunters rising on the top of the butte, only a hundred yards from him at the most, he put his horse to it.

The next instant, he was across.

A narrow escape, nevertheless, for his horse, which had missed footing on touching the opposite side, staggered on the very brink, damp and slippery, and only recovered itself by an effort which its own dread supplied.

The leader of the chasers tried to follow, but his animal refused the leap, and he had to give it up, as spurs and even a stab with a knife could not overcome its obstinacy.

His men pulled up at the edge and fired two or three shots a-piece at the unharmed and disappearing Marauder of the Mines.

CHAPTER XXII.

THREE OF THE RAVAGERS RUBBED OUT.—JACK'S ADVENTURE.—HOSPITALITY REPAYED.—TREACHERY REWARDED AND FOILED.

OVER mountain and valley land, Joaquin continued to fly until he could feel confident that he was fully out of danger.

He went through Carson's Pass and on the fourth day came to a miners' camp on Walker River, where he passed the night.

But, fearing to be recognised, he started at daybreak, and by the same time of the following day, came upon a second camp which he fancied belonged to Indians.

On drawing nearer, he found himself, to his great surprise, in the presence of Valenzuela and Three-fingered Jack, who no more than he expected such a meeting.

While breakfasting, the chief learnt from them the result of their peregrinations, and how they had chanced to be at the same spot as himself.

On quitting the Arroyo, Valenzuela had led his company to Weaverville, conforming in that to the orders of Joaquin. Before arriving there, he had seized some horses and had chosen fifteen of his men to conduct them to the rallying-place.

He was then with Garcia and four others.

Pursued by several rancheros, the servants of the horse-owners, the six thieves had been compelled to seek safety by crossing, by swimming, a very rapid stream. Hit and disabled by bullets, three of Valenzuela's men had been drowned. Castillo, one of the three left, had managed to reach the opposite shore, but a Missourian had saved him the trouble of proceeding any considerable distance on it, by sending a rifle ball at him.

In brief Valenzuela and Jack were the only ones who had managed to escape.

When at Weaverville, Jack had wished to go into a dance-house, notwithstanding the objections of the prudent Valenzuela.

Four men standing up to the bar, were drinking while conversing on the late horse-thefts. One of them had expressed his opinion that Joaquin was no stranger to the affair.

"To see him and his rascals at the end of the ropes," said he, "I'd change my head for a balloon."

Garcia placed himself in front of the speaker and said rudely :

"For a pistol *ball, loon?*" sneered he, "do you mean?"

"Who in thunder are you?"

"If you know how to count, that ought to satisfy you," returned the Mexican, holding up his mutilated hand.

"Three-fingered—"

"Jack—yes, sir-ree!"

And, without waiting for more, the speaker drew his knife and plunged it into the man's breast.

Three or four hands seized him and he and Valenzuela had to fight their way out.

Their horses had not been touched fortunately and mounting them, they con-

trived to drop their enemies before they came to Beckworth's Pass, and the place where they had just met their superior.

The next day, the three Mexicans pursued the road to Arroyo Cantuva. They crossed the Sonora range and the Tuolumne at the south fork.

Dismounting at Rattlesnake Bar, they entered a house and called for supper. It was occupied by an old man, his son and his daughter. The three Mexicans, armed to the teeth, surprised them somewhat, but they said nothing, and the meal demanded was served up promptly by the girl.

Murieta, who was something of the gentleman for all of his cut-throat and robber's exterior, chatted in the most affable manner with the latter while she gracefully waited upon him and his comrades.

The old man remarked with suspicion their voracity, but kept his impressions to himself.

When the repast was over, Valenzuela rose, advanced towards the youth, who had remained in his seat by the fire-place, and taking aim at him with his revolver, asked him with extreme politeness what he had to say against their sacking the house.

"If you've got any objections to make, speak quick," added he, cocking his weapon playfully.

"Senor, stay! I didn't know you were robbers!" began the old man.

He commenced to make such an outcry that Three-fingered Jack had to gag him.

Of course the youth had given his consent to the inevitable pillage, and the whole dwelling was rummaged.

Only a few hundred dollars were found.

When about to ride into Weaversville, Joaquin reflected that the imprudence of Garcia might bring difficulties upon him as well as upon Valenzuela, and he resolved to enter the town alone.

Consequently, he ordered the couple to hurry on in company to the rendezvous, while he himself would remain a couple of days in the residence of one of the members of the band, Juan Berryessa.

This person had many times furnished excellent news, to members of the active force, and at several other periods had lent them money and horses.

These services had been generously rewarded by the leader, who considered him as a sincere and faithful friend.

He was, truth to say, nothing of the kind.

Without letting it appear, Berryessa had sworn and felt deadly hatred for Joaquin, and had been constantly seeking a good chance to give him up to justice.

At this very moment, believing that the game was in his hands, he was trying to find more actively than ever a means of consummating his treachery.

Three or four days had elapsed since the departure of Valenzuela and his mate.

One evening when Joaquin was visiting the fandangoes in hope of meeting some friend of his, he perceived by accident that his case was empty of its revolver.

He fancied that the weapon had fallen out and that he had mechanically buttoned the strap over, while habit and the certainty of the cover being in its place, had prevented him doubting the lightness.

Immediately, he retraced his steps to seek it.

First, he looked in the stable beside the house to see that his horse was not grudged feed, and then entered by the back door a little room adjoining the kitchen, which had been given to him.

While he was advancing in the dark and groping for his candle and some matches, he heard voices in conversation in the next chamber.

One of these was an American, and the other, quite as certainly, his host.

In any other circumstances, Joaquin would have taken no heed of this fact, but his name, distinctly pronounced by both of the dialogists, and in a tone arguing nothing friendly, set him on the alert.

Though the idea of "his friend" conspiring against him, had something too absurd in it to attract him, he was naturally anxious to discover the why and wherefore of the utterance of his name, and that motive appeared sufficient to induce him to play the eavesdropper.

He crossed the kitchen on tip-toe, and glued his ear to the board partition separating the apartments.

"Yes," Berryessa was saying, "so will my vengeance be satisfied, for he has mortally offended me at various times, either here or in Mexico. Besides, I want money. My losses at 'monte' have forced me to sell my rancho at half its value, and—by the bye, what's the figure out for the bandit?"

"Well, I can't tell kerzactly. I reckon it's goin' on five thousand, and mebbe nearer ten thousand dollars."

"Give me one thousand down on the nail to-morrow morning, and you shall have him."

"But are you right down airnest sartin that it is him. If you kin swear to it, I kin git the sum together jess' as soon as you say—it's a first rate spec. But are you sure?"

"Why shouldn't I be? I've known him a little too long to be mistaken there."

"Where is he now? You say a few miles from here—where's that?"

Joaquin could divine that, during the slight pause that intervened, Berryessa was winking knowingly.

"Caramba! Am I a greenhorn?"

"I could take you for an accomplice, one of the band, and have you lynched."

"Bah! you haven't any proof that I am even speaking to you now!"

"Very well. I don't keer to fall out with you. If you're willing to give him over to us to-night—"

"Hold on a bit! what do you mean by *us*?"

"Jee-rusaleme! do you s'pose that I was a goin' to take him single-handed? Ha, ha! No, sir-ree, Number One can't do everything. There will be three of us, and I'll get one of my mates who'll fetch along the money you want."

"All right, then. That settles it. You pay me that sum, whether he's alive or dead?"

"To be sure, if you are serious."

"I am more serious than ever before in my life, and I tell you that, if it hadn't been for my bad luck at cards, I would have asked three times as much. It's no child's play, I warn you."

"You can't skeer me. When and where are we to tackle him?"

"In this very house, and in a couple of hours, provided you have the cash ready."

"Never you fear. I will be back before ten minutes, and look upon Mister Walkin as walking out his career to-morrow. Wait for me."

On these words, the American stalked out, closing the door behind him.

In another second, Murieta sprang into the room like a wild beast and, his dagger out, he caught Berryessa by the throat, petrifying him by the sudden appearance.

"Silence!" hissed he when the other tried to speak. "You have spoken your last. So," added he, after a few moments spent in tightening his hold on the wretch's throat, "so you are betraying me for money, and to be revenged! revenged! for what? Haven't I always been your best friend? You sell me for a few ounces of gold, trying to make the buyer believe that you are acting through revenge. Who shall I trust henceforth? Those who like you, wretch,

have hitherto shown themselves true and devoted, may turn on me anytime, and give me up to those who want to deck trees with me and my comrades. And you, Berryessa, act this way, when supposed I you most of all incapable of such falseness. Die!"

He was driving his knife a second time into the traitor's breast when, the door flying open, in walked the partner of the dying man.

He understood all, and, dropping the bag of gold, he grasped his revolver in its stead.

"Who are you?" challenged he.

"I'm the man you bought at that price," replied the robber pointing to the fallen sack.

"Joaquin? Surrender, or you're a dead man!"

"Very likely, only life for life! As soon as you fire, I am on you with my knife."

"I prefer to take you alive, or a lot I'd let you do with your steel. You had better be quick about it, but you can't escape anyway. Two of my mates will be here in two or three minutes. I wasn't going to pay this man you've murdered so much money without witnesses."

"Murdered? punished."

"It doesn't matter. Down with your dagger, or I fire!"

"Fate's against me," said Joaquin, "I see all's up. There, take my only weapon! All I ask is for you to give me up to the authorities and not to the mob."

"I'm quite willing," said to the other.

Taking advantage of the moment when the man, who was too full of fair-play himself to suspect treachery, lowered his fire-arm and extended his other hand to receive the weapon, the faithless bandit leaped upon him like a panther, threw him to the floor and pinned him down with a dagger-stroke; then, catching up the revolver and uncocking it as he ran, he glided through his room and out round to the stable. Merely biting his horse, he mounted bareback and galloped away at the very moment that the friends of the slain American entered the house and room in which lay the two dead bargainers.

Joaquin was scarcely a mile beyond Mariposa when all the people were in motion and many horsemen put off in pursuit.

But they exerted themselves all in vain for they could not overtake the chief, especially when he had taken to the mountains.

Two weeks after this narrow escape from the Judas, Murieta arrived at the main rendezvous, where he found collected almost all who were ranked under his flag, with more than four hundred horses which they had run off from different parts of the state.

The captain explained the cause of his prolonged absence and hurried into his tent to tell Clarina the same and learn from her whatever information of past events in the camp that she might have to impart to him.

Among other pieces of news, he was told that one of his connections at San Luis Obispo, called Texas Jack (who is not to be confounded with a rascal of the same name who has had an account of his deserved execution mentioned already by us), had presented himself to the band with two companions.

These latter were complete strangers, but Jack had gone surety that they were meritorious recruits. They had been out horse-stealing when they had come upon the head-quarters by chance.

A great number of the troop had been on the point of kicking them out as intruders, and even of killing them as spies; but some who had been acquainted with Jack in Lower California, placed faith in his assertion and so warmly pleaded his cause that life had been granted them until the commander of the desperadoes should have returned.

On learning this, Murieta charged Antonio instantly to bring the prisoners before him. They had been placed under a strong guard in a tent at the south-eastern end of the Arroyo, where they could be in safety but not be mingling with the banditti to learn valuable secrets.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TEXAS JACK.—GARCIA JUDGES AND EXECUTES “FOR HIS OWN HAND.”—PILLAGE OF THE THREE COUNTIES.—A PIECE OF BRAVADO.

A FEW words on Texas Jack, an arrant knave.

In 1836, he was twelve years old. His father, American, went off in the army against Mexico, at the time of the Battle of San Jacinto.

Jack wanted to be of the expedition, but was refused as being too young. Desirous to prove, like another and inferior Cid, that he could fight as well as anybody thrice his age, he picked a quarrel with an Indian, a friend of his father, killed him, cut off his head and tossed it by the scalplock at his father's feet, when the latter had done chasing Deserter Riley's gang and bestowing leaden favors on guerillas.

Texas Jack was in San Francisco in '51, in company with the Louisianian called Indian Fred, Bill Flanders, an ex-plug ugly of Baltimore, and a Mexican known as Monty, abbreviation of Montezuma.

These four had with them a number of horses and mules, of which they had relieved the rancheros in the valleys of San Joaquin and San Jose. They corralled these in a yard in Mission Street, near Primera Street, and went to a tavern near the old police station.

In this house lodged several policemen, one of whom was sick a-bed.

From his room, he heard and recognized the voice of Indian Fred.

He called him and advised him to leave the city forthwith, as he knew of there being three warrants out for him on heavy charges of theft and that, over and above that, he was looked upon as the principal in a certain murder recently committed in a neighboring county.

Fred informed Texas of what had happened to him and set out for Stockton, with his two companions.

Scarcely were they gone than Jack had disposed of the best of the stolen cattle to the hotel-keeper, and the same day he drove them all to the public square and sold them at auction, a deed so bold that it was successful.

Then he went off some fifteen miles on the Santa Clara Road, entered a ranch where the hotel-keeper had had his new purchase taken, stole him anew and rode off with him to the Mission of San Luis Obispo.

There it was that he made the acquaintance of Murieta and several of his gang in a house of ill fame kept by one Victor Le Nariss, situated between the Mission and the place where the coast seamen disembark.

Texas was lucky enough on a certain occasion to render a service to Joaquin by furnishing him with intelligence of some of his pursuers, and the bandit, not to be behind hand in generosity, made him a gift of a magnificent horse, a counterpart, except in sex (for mares are not used for riding by Mexicans), of Dick Turpin's famous Black Bess.

In the course of his adventures, Jack had fallen into the habit of sleeping, when he camped alone, with his head between the fore-legs of his intelligent steed.

One night, while he was resting, near San Antonio Creek, he was suddenly awakened by his horse, which was pulling his hair by biting it. He had hardly opened his eyes than he caught sight of three or four persons, half breeds or

Mexicans, who were stealthily approaching him with the evident design of killing or robbing him.

Indeed, he had barely got into the saddle before bullets began to shower upon him, but he escaped, while the horse neighed cunningly as if he rather enjoyed the outwitting of those who had forgotten that thief should not rifle thief, or dog eat dog.

When he and his companions were led before Joaquin, the latter agreed that his men had been right in sparing them, and he gave them their permission to go their way immediately.

Several members of the band offered objections and so hotly that Murieta, for fear that the three would be murdered, deemed it proper to have them escorted by Valenzuela, Three-fingered Jack and a couple more, at least half way to the San Joaquin River.

This party had left the camp behind by some sixteen miles, when Garcia rushed his horse up to one of the three and deliberately blew his brains out with a point-blank discharge. On seeing this, Texas Jack and his remaining comrade clapped spurs to their horses and dashed off as fast as possible to escape the second onslaught of Garcia.

The latter's two next shots disabled and unhorsed Jack's companion, who however, had a grapple and a fight of much fierceness with the assassin, by which delay, Texas got off.

Seeing that it was impossible to gain ground upon him, as he was fifty yards away and going three feet to his two, the Mexican delivered the three last barrels' contents on the fugitive and, pulling up, cried :

“Good luck, old boy ! Close shave !”

With these words, he returned to his friends who, from the very first shot, had dwelt stupefied, and in doubt whether to act for or against the prisoners.

“It's a pretty piece of work you've done,” said Valenzuela, “but I suppose you had the captain's orders.”

“Orders,” returned Garcia, charging his six-shooter. “I don't think so. No other orders than you got yourself.”

“What ! did you kill those men on your own responsibility ?”

“Why, yes, Caramba ! And I'd have settled the third only he 'scaped me, curse him !”

“What did you do it for ?” inquired Valenzuela. “It was useless.”

“Useless ! What do you say ? useless to kill Americans ? I advise you to go back to Mexico and turn monk. Don't faint at blood-spilling. I suppose those men had been let off—”

“Well ?”

“They would have betrayed us.”

“The captain did not think so. And, as it is, you have let one escape and perhaps made an enemy of him, for, though I have every reason to believe that he has always been our friend, he will believe that Joaquin commanded the treachery.”

“Let him and the captain and you believe whatever you please,” growled Jack. “I care as little for one as for the other.”

On the return to camp, good care was taken not to relate what had happened on the road, for the companions of Garcia feared their chief's wrath and they felt that they would be considered as accomplices for not having prevented the bloody assassination.

A week afterwards, as the month of March, 1853, opened, a series of brigandish exploits commenced, which thrilled the whole country with terror and indignation.

The outlaws had chosen as the seat of their operations the three richest counties of the Golden Land, to wit: El Dorado, Calaveras and Tuolumne,

and never since the days of the Free Lances, of Alva and of Wallenstein, had an Eden been so swiftly and completely assailed.

Detached companies of four or five, at most a dozen, had been scattered all over the district and such was the number, the variety and extent of their depredations that the voice of Runner could not enlarge upon them and we cannot find space to record them.

Ask your friends who were in California then, and they will each have their brace to a dozen of stories to tell, we warrant.

Theft, murder as atrocious as could be, fires and plundering formed the subject of universal conversation and of much fear. Some of these misdeeds were committed in broadest day, others were shrouded in blackest night, but everybody saw in them the mind or arm of Joaquin. Though the numerous lines and circles of this vast and complex outbreak were greatly divergent, yet, like a cobweb, they all were connected with a common centre, their originator being there watching the result of his weaving.

There was scarcely a place of any importance in the state which was not unavoidably disgraced by one or two of his secret agents.

There rarely, or never, were lacking places of shelter to hide wounded and the stolen horses, and there might be named here certain farms, kept by men then quite the thing for honesty and respectability in the eyes—too often misty and webbed—of the world, whereon Joaquin and his associates found help in times of need.

While marauding all along the road, Murieta and eight of his braves had come upon one of the banks of the Tuolumne in the middle of one of the March nights. The ferryboat was so dexterously fastened to its little wharf that it was impossible for them to make use of it themselves as they were in the habit of doing.

They proceeded consequently to the ferryman's house, finding him so deeply slumbering that the only way to arouse him was to break in the door.

He came out frightened, to see what was the matter.

"We want to cross," replied Joaquin, "but before making the passage, we would like you to lend us all the money you have about you. This may prove to you that no beating about the bush is allowed," added he, displaying his six-shooter under the poor fellow's nose.

"Put it up," said he, "I will give you all there is."

He lit a candle and produced a purse containing only a hundred dollars.

"Come now," growled Three-fingered Jack, who was of the party and who never wanted to miss burning powder, "this won't do. You've got more than this, out with it."

He would have fired, indeed, but Joaquin ordered him to keep quiet.

"It is all I have, señor," replied the trembling ferryman.

"I don't trouble myself about so little," said the chief, with that generosity which is sometimes seen in those who are "flush," "keep it. Take us over to the other side and you shall be paid besides."

Without any other adventure, and that was scarcely remarkable, the little party arrived in the vicinity of Stockton after a two days' journey, encamping three miles or so out of town under a luxuriant clump of trees.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STORY OF THE 'SCORCHERS' OF FRANCE.—THE PARIS LAWYER AND THE CHIEF OF THE BAND.—FOILED!—DISCOVERED.—THE ATTACK ON THE FARM.—THE FAILURE, FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

"COME, Rafael Quintara, let's have a story or a song," said Joaquin's men, as they smoked round the fire, carefully sheltered on the side towards the sleeping town of Stockton.

"Very well, if it's my turn," replied the bandit, kissing the mouth of his brandy-flask for a moment. "Wait a bit till I think of something. Well, here goes. I heard it from a Frenchman at Guaymas who had been left there sick in Raousset Boulbon's filibustering, and who was a relation of the great French lawyer Berryer. So you may rely on the story being true."

* * * * *

Some dozen leagues from Chartres, near the Vendomoise country, was a great wood called the Forest of Orgares.

In its centre were large quarries from which had been taken the immense quantities of stone required to build the magnificent Cathedral of Chartres.

One day when all the authorities of France had their hands full from the distressed condition of the Republic, for France was in the great Revolution, then, four or five young fellows, having crept into a cavern almost without end to shelter themselves from a storm, began to wonder at the extent of the excavations and the loneliness of the surroundings.

"Body of me!" cried one, generally nick-named Henry the Handsome, "what a place for a colony of fellows of our kidney!"

Half a year afterwards, the quarries were the haunt of the vilest and most fearful gallows-birds, under that young man's lead.

Women were admitted into the band.

The wretches' most common plan was to pretend to be beggars and stop at nightfall at farm-houses to ask for bread or shelter.

The moment they could, they would overpower the people in the dwelling.

If the prisoners refused to tell where was hidden their money—for the farmers had no banks in which to place the proceeds of their produce in those unsettled days—they were bound, and their feet and legs were toasted at great fires until the skin was *scorched* off amid unutterable agony or they acknowledged anything.

Things rose to such a pitch that, as the wits of the country could not vie with those of the cut-throats, the head department was petitioned to send down some criminal lawyer who would undertake the ferreting out.

Monsieur Thomas Mereville was selected.

A sharp December wind was freezing the moisture on the trees and ground, and making very grateful a larg fire that leaped up in the ample chymney-place of the Brothers-All Inn of Saint Maurice.

The half dozen of the household of the tavern, landlord, cooks and servants with a young and good-looking traveler were listening to the story told by Mr. M. Mereville, as he dried his mud and ice spotted trowser legs at the fire.

He was addressing a soldier in a captain's uniform who stood near him.

"You're perfectly right, my dear captain, I was very imprudent," said the lawyer. "I ought to have asked an escort of you as I passed through Chartrain. It was folly that spurred me on. I wanted to get here by dark, but night overtook me when I was all of a league from here. I was a little uneasy but I spurred on my post-horse. Suddenly, without my having had the least warning, a whole troop of men jumped out of the roadside, right and left—"

"The Scorchers!" interrupted the landlord's rough voice and his servants' shriller ones.

"I believe so, my friends," replied the advocate blandly. "One of them shouted: 'All right. That's him!' I was pulled off my horse quicker than my smartest clerk can attest a will. I set up a cry, while they handled me rudely. Just then, a gallop of horses behind me, alarmed them, and, after knocking me down with a backhander in the mouth, luckily with a naked fist and not with one of their ugly cudgels, they darted off, with my valise. I think one of them said, as they ran: 'I'll see you again!' but I ain't sure. Anyhow, I owe all my salvation, under heaven, to brave Captain Vasseur here present," concluded the lawyer, shaking the officer's hand again with his old wrinkled one.

"Did one of the Scorchers promise to pay you a visit?" inquired the soft voice of the traveler, who had the look of being a pedler in a fair business. "If he did, sir, be careful; they always keep their word, don't they?"

"Always," chorussed the assemblage. "Francis is right."

"And could not the captain catch 'em?" asked Francis, mildly admiring the officer.

"Sir," replied the latter, taking the look as if he had received many such, as indeed his noble bearing deserved, "I did not see the highwaymen at all. Well for them. The darkness was enough to forbid pursuit, and the thicket was impenetrable. However, I mean to be to horse at dawn, when I will scour the country. Let me only catch one of the wretches to begin with, and I'll answer for the others. It's my opinion, too, that we have more beggars prowling about that even the hard times make necessary. We may have the brigands under our very hands often, without knowing it," said he.

"So you may, *without knowing it*," repeated Mr. Francis, while the landlord and his retinue nodded, and left the room to dish up supper.

The officer went out of the tavern after the meal to see the chief magistrate of the village.

Meanwhile, Mr. Francis the pedler had made himself quite intimate with the old advocate and had heard nearly a score of anecdotes concerning members of the bar, all of which elevated the narrator into a station which should have been that of the Government Prosecutor. Merville even invited his new acquaintance into his bedroom, where they chatted by the fire.

All at once, the man of the blackrobe uttered an exclamation, rose and, with a frightened stare, looked at the single window of the room.

"A man—a man's face there!" gasped the terrified barrister.

Francis leaped up and to the place, threw open the four-paned sash and looked on coolly.

"*To the right. The signal*," whispered he to a man indeed clinging to the rough outside. "There's not a soul in sight anywhere below, much less there," added he aloud, returning, "you can see for yourself."

But the lawyer did not accept the invitation, though he did the assertion.

"I'm a little affected, I suppose, by the blow that stunned me. I attach too much importance to that villain's threat—mere words, mere words—"

"Perhaps," remarked the merchant-pedler; "but, at all events, a good sound sleep will cure you. Good night, will you permit me to say it?"

"G—good night. Stay. Do you think that this room is s—safe?" stammered the really affrighted man, who had commenced to believe that there was danger in being the open enemy of the formidable Scorchers. "I have papers of value about me—which the robbers did not have time to take—or I wouldn't ask."

"Certainly!" exclaimed Francis, quite joyful at these last words for some reason or other. "Nothing but a babe in arms could be forced through that window and a ladder would be required even then—it's all of thirty feet to the

stable-yard below. The doors are country made, none of your city card-boards, solid oak and plenty of iron. That General Bonaparte who, they say, is dealing the Austrians such hard knocks, couldn't break through that, I warrant. This window in the wall opens on my room, and—unless I give up my honest, if not too profitable profession of selling lace and trinkets, scarfs and ribbons," concluded Francis laughing, "for the black calling of a pillager—you need not fear."

"Good night."

All had gone to sleep in the tavern.

All except Francis.

When he was convinced of this, he went to his table, for he had laid down and made his bed creak an hour ago as the servant maids passed through the entry to retire up-stairs, and cut his candle cleverly into eight pieces, each small, to be sure, but still able to burn for a brief space.

Cleverly did he cut hollows round the wicks, and lighted them all set side by side on the window sill.

In a few seconds, while they burnt, and while he peered over them out into the gloom, he saw a star spring from the ground, turn a summerset over a tree, and fall. This was done twice more.

Then, leisurely, he extinguished his little tapers one by one, each end at a time, till, solitary gleam, the central piece burned on.

Fifteen or twenty minutes passed, Francis had replaced the light on the table, pushed off the bits of melted tallow, and opened the little window.

He expressed no surprise when a kind of ball appeared on the stable-roofs, rolled down on a dungheap to the walls of the house—while the huge watch-dog look on silent and as if enchanted—and began to ascend like a fly, until a man's face was beside Francis's.

"You, Acrobat the Thumbless?" quierred he cautiously.

"Of course. Who else can climb so fashion?" replied the man with a sort of pride. "Pardon me, captain, for mistaking the other room, and coming before the signal."

"You are fined forty francs a-week for two months," said Francis, sternly. "Silence! no excuses."

"The seven I had with me are dismissed."

"That's right. I don't want you either. Tell the band to lie perdu, and all the outlyers to close in. That captain will be up and doing in the morning. Go."

"Thanks, Captain Henri," said the man, glad—chilled as he was by the icy blast—to accomplish his descent skillfully and disappear.

The watch-dog let him pass, unchallenged as before.

(When, long after the trials of the Scorchers took place, one Jean Pierre Folaret, *alias* Acrobat the Thumbless, *alias* the Juggler, was proven to have the secret of preparing a weed called by the peasantry "Our Lady's hair," into a powder, which sprinkled over a man, "charmed" wild and tame beasts.)

Midnight was come.

Profound calm weighed upon the house. Outside, the north-wind rattled boughs of trees and jingled the icicles on the swinging signboard.

The last sound of active life in the next room to the so-called pedler's had been when "boots" had entered to see if the distinguished lawyer had all he required.

Francis, listening, had heard a chink of money and some low words which he had not been able to make out.

"If he is buying anything," muttered he, "he can invest in a gravestone and a tomb-wreath with advantage."

Since then, he had heard the advocate slumber lightly, poorly, and broken in rest by dreams.

His uneven respiration gave token of how impressionable he was and how he had been impressed by the late outrage upon him.

Mr. Merville was awakened from a vision of his in which he was walking along an alley of which the trees on either side were gibbets adorned with dead, when they all fell in upon him.

The ghastly forms, the greasy ropes, the hideous beams, descended on him—he tried to shake off the tarrying load—one gibbet-arm rested spite of all on his shoulder—he awoke!

His shoulder was indeed touched.

He started up convulsively and faltered in a die-away tone :

“ Who—o is that ? ”

“ Awake at last, M. Merville,” answered a cautious voice. “ Very well. We’ll have our chat.”

The poor veteran of legal warfare, whose ideas were not in order yet, quickly pulled aside still wider the curtains of the bed to have a look at a person who wanted “ to chat ” at such an hour.

The candle burned dimly in its floating bowl in a basin, tremulously reflected on the gloom of the room.

A man was between him and the light, seated on the chair from which he had unceremoniously brushed the clothes of the man a-bed.

“ What ! M. Francis, my friend the pedler ! ” said he.

“ Often that by day,” responded the voice deeply, “ but by night—now, at all events—Henri the Handsome, with fifty other names, Captain of the Scorchers, at yours and everybody else’s service ! ”

“ Captain of the Scorchers ! ” reiterated the man of law. “ I am lost ! ” groaned he, falling back on his pillow.

“ Don’t speak so loud—you’ve no witness to bully now,” said Henri the chief, severely. “ To business. I suspect that you have papers in your possession proving that the Henri Maisond’Or who was sentenced for twenty years to the galleys (but who escaped) is illegitimate son of Michel Dralange of Dourdan, and not the lawful one. I must have those proofs and destroy them, for his friends, though they know him a miscreant, must not know he is a bastard ! And I want the evidence you have that proves Michel’s son to be the same as Maisond’Or. And I want all the papers you have concerning my band.”

“ But I—I haven’t them,” moaned the advocate, convulsively writhing in the bed.

Nor had he, for with a fox’s excessive cunning, he had sent “ boots ” with these very documents to deposit them with the magistrate for surety.

But he dared not tell the desperate man before him, that.

“ You have them, sir, I am sure. True, they’re not in your clothes, or under the pillow, for I have searched. Where are they hidden ? ”

“ I haven’t got them. They were—yes ! in the valise that the robbers took from me on the road ! ”

“ Liar ! Those robbers were my rascals, and my own hands opened your valise. Do you not recal my voice ? ’Twas I who promised to visit you ? I keep my word.”

The lawyer shuddered more than ever.

“ Methinks, Master Lawyer of Paris,” sneered Henri the Handsome, “ that you have not learnt yet of what I am capable. Let me tell you that you ought to tremble to think of being alone with me in this chamber where you are wholly at my mercy.”

The very excess of his alarm unloosed the man’s tongue.

“ I will cry out—and they’ll take you—you’re alone,” half-threatened he.

“ Bah ? ” returned the chief of the brigands with a scornful laugh. “ This whole house is at my mercy, even if I could not handle its whole force singly.

I've only to open that window, give a signal and to-morrow's sun will light on smoking ruins and some half-baked carcases."

Inarticulate and faint moans only came from the lawyer.

The impatient bandit bent down and said in penetrating accents :

"Have done, thousand thunders! Where are the papers? I must have them—"

But vainly did he wait for a word or a movement that would betray the secret-place of the objects of his searches.

The wretched old man continued to gasp and shiver.

At the height of fury, Henri the Handsome drew his knife and was about to nail the unfortunate man to his couch, when a suspicion struck him forcibly and suddenly.

He bent over the lawyer and tore the clothing off his features. Then he beheld that the poor old man, broken by unwonted fatigue of traveling and by the emotions of the late assault (perhaps affected by the blow), was suffering from congestion of the brain.

His face was puffed out with blood, his eyes rolled awfully, and his tied tongue revealed approaching paralysis.

The robber leader contemplated the horrid sight placidly, and laughed.

"A visitation by me? a visitation of God!" said he jestingly; "a real, natural stroke of apoplexy. By the lips of my love this is too much luck for me. You're very kind to get into a fit, my dear lawyer of Paris. On my honor! I was wondering how I should clear myself of suspicion, and not have to take to flight, and here you save me the trouble! If that is Parisian politeness, by heaven! we country folks are clowns!"

The dreadful word; "apoplexy!" appeared to have reached the already benumbed intelligence of the sufferer, for his speech was thawed by a superhuman effort and he slowly spoke:

"A doctor—he—lp—bleed me!"

"I intended to do so, my dear sir," replied Henri, sheathing his knife, "but I can't bear to cut such a friend. I don't mind your making faces—do as you please, while I hunt for the papers."

Without attending to the tortured man, he scrupulously examined the apartment.

After having done so and re-searched the lawyer's clothes, which he replaced on the chair carefully, he rummaged the bed minutely.

The miserable old man seemed to be past seeing or hearing.

He did not move, except by a transient spasm, his limbs were too weak.

At intervals his eyes caught a spark, but were almost extinguished speedily.

"Sure enough, they are nowhere," said the commander of the Scorchers. "At all events he cannot tell all he knows! Things are so so."

He surveyed the apartment to note if he had disturbed nothing, and, bowing as he took a final mocking look at the living corpse, said with affected politeness while a railing smile sat on his really handsome face:

"Good night and a long sleep, my friend of the Parisian bar who comes to the country to hunt my Scorchers!"

On tip-toe of his stocking-feet, he left the room as he had come, that is: through the common window of the two apartments and quietly laid himself down, without hearkening to the groans, fainter and fainter, in the adjoining room.

A little after breakfast the next morning, Francis the pedler presented himself at the house of the magistrate, M. Peursans, and—being a relation of the official—was admitted instantly.

The magistrate was at work in his office-room signing papers.

Francis hastened, when asked the news, to acquaint him with the exciting and sad affair that had happened at the Inn of the Brother-all, that is to say:

how the great Parisian gentleman of the long robe stopping there, had been frightened into a fit of apoplexy, which had been his death.

"Very strange, untimely," remarked M. Peursans. "Excuse me a moment till I send Jean to inquire further."

While he was gone, Henri the Handsome used his fine eyes in a search over the papers on the table and in the pigeon holes over it.

A morocco pocket-book, which bore the stamp of "Faite a Paris, 22, Rue des Deux Ecus, Alphonse Tirefin et Cie," attracted his attention.

What more likely than that was the very thing he wanted.

That whispered colloquy with the servant of the inn, the money paid! of course.

Why had he not questioned "boots?"

This idea, once born, grew into the proportion of a certainty, and, with fixed eye and nervous hand, he contemplated the leather cover.

Incapable of resisting such a temptation, he had his finger on it, when the magistrate entered.

"'S death!" exclaimed the latter, "it is just as you say, for Dr. Daniel was passing and he had been at the inn. When the servant entered, after they had to break in the door, you know, M. Mereville was cold. Awful to be struck dead thus, and after he had just escaped the assassin's hand."

"Amen!" said Francis, thinking of something else.

There was a silence, during which the magistrate thoughtfully covered several sheets of paper with writing and filled up blanks, while Francis greedily regarded the pocketbook.

By chance the former looked up and he perceived the object of his gaze.

He noticed the other's attention but did not understand it.

"Poor Mereville, it seems as if he had obeyed a presentiment in sending me his papers," said he. "I must assure myself of the nature of his trust."

He took the leather case, undid the gum elastic fastening (a new idea at that day) and opened it.

The robber had the notion of snatching it and running off.

Who could stop him?

Peursans was no match for him and he could easily slip out of the house.

But the very consciousness of his power checked him.

Henri the Handsome liked to brave danger.

Hence he kept his seat, but instead of preserving the mask of mildness and good humor which he had worn, he let his features assume a more natural expression of audacity and ferocity.

His bold look and haughty smile seemed to hint a spirit defying the world.

The magistrate glanced over the endorsement of several papers, had his wandering vision caught and brought to bear on one especially, read it, read the next, and more with an intense fascination.

Abruptly he flung a fiery glance on Handsome Henri, who did not stir and only smiled the more proudly.

He resumed the reading, until, throwing all the documents on the table and leaning towards the cool captain, said :

"And are you Maisonforte the convict? You must be—you smile! Ah! and did you kill this lawyer! I see, I see! oh, devil—"

"My dear relative," said the bandit tranquilly, with a stress on the words, "what flea has bitten you? Can you be affected by the death of an old chap whom you never set eyes on?"

"Use no such trifling, insulting tone, unsuiting your dangerous position," said the magistrate energetically. "I know you now, Maisonforte, escaped from the galleys."

"And your relative, all the same. The papers prove one just as much as the other."

"What a shame on our family! But I will do my duty and denounce you as the escaped convict and as the probable murderer of the lawyer."

"His real murderer, if it comes to that," said Henri, crossing his legs easily.

"And," continued the authority, as a sudden light broke in on him, "you may be connected with that fearful band, the Scorchers!"

"The Scorchers follow my lead as the hounds do the huntsman," said the brigand calmly. "But for all that, what can you do?"

M. Peursans was silent.

He was alone in the house except a couple of female domestics, he had no weapons, and the chief of the band of Orgares was not the man to be assailed single-handed, as his attitude of confidence sufficiently indicated.

The responsibility weighing upon him made an icy sweat stand upon his brows.

Henry the Handsome kept his seat in such a careless way that anybody would have believed him the judge and the magistrate who paced the room, the culprit.

At last the robber rose and took Peursan's arm.

"I only ask your company to the door and I'll leave you. You had better make away with those papers when you return, if you know your own good. Come."

"The stupefied magistrate obeyed mechanically.

They stood at the front door.

"Wretch, wretch!" burst forth the official as his indignation at length grew past constraint, "how can you tempt me so. Do I not, by calling on you the vengeance of the laws, prove to all that I am a righteous man who holds you in as equal scorn as horror?"

"Not exactly," hissed the bandit, "Folks will say: 'What a far-seeing kinsman, who waited till rewards were at their height, ere selling his own blood.'"

This last subtle argument, of which the magistrate felt the truth too clearly, made him desperate.

He fancied himself already dishonored, lost, ruined, accused of complicity with his crime-stained connection, who had visited him and been closeted with him at all hours and on countless occasions.

The peril appeared to be unavoidable, whichever way he looked at it.

His grief was neither mute nor inactive, nevertheless.

"Off! away, scoundrel! let me never see you more. I keep my promise now, but I will be the first to start in pursuit of you, after twenty hours' grace!"

Luckily for the speaker, he had strength enough to push the bandit out of the door and slam it to in his face, for the thwarted ruffian—on seeing the barrier put between them so timely—ground his teeth and foamed at the mouth, wildly hammering on the door with fist and foot.

He called to Peursans in a wrathful voice, but the latter had no such imprudence as to put himself in his power again.

The maddened chief was not slow to feel the danger in acting so like a maniac.

He hurried away to the inn, strapped on his back the case of finery which covered his journeys from suspicion, and made for the retreat of his band, threatening and planning as he went.

That night a large body of men, on foot, were marching out of the heart of the Forest of Orgares to reach the highway conducting to the village of Saint Maurice.

This part of the wood was within the bounds which Captain Henri had boldly formed as the territory of his band.

The trees were "blazed" as landmarks and names of him and his lieutenants cut upon them.

No travelers dared to enter under the shadow of the oaks ; few of the peasants were in the outskirts except in broad day.

Armed forces were often afraid to pass along the grass-grown roads.

Such a terror did the malefactors spread that they took little pains to conceal themselves.

It was found out afterwards that the farmers of the vicinity very well knew the real character of the pretended beggars who forced them to be generous in almsgiving.

They ventured neither to complain or murmur and humbly submitted to the burden, without thinking that they became accomplices in imposing it upon themselves.

This party of the brigand were going soon to have a fresh proof of the fear that they inspired, and a proof, less welcome, of the fact that human patience and sufferance can be tried too far.

The miscreants had been more than an hour a-foot and they had become very thirsty, from being so well wrapped up, though in rags outside, against the cold.

A little refreshment and a slight repose was their desire.

They stopped on the top of a hill, which was the last elevation of the plain on which was the village of Saint Maurice at the other end.

Henri the Handsome surveyed the landscape.

It was gloomy enough, but bright star-light let large objects be distinguished.

After a moment's gaze, the commander pointed out a large farm-house which rose half way down the hill-side.

"That's the crib of that old rascal Marchet. Come on," said he laconically.

They descended thitherward.

A light shining in the large hall, or main room, told that the people had not retired to rest, despite the advanced hour.

Beyond a doubt they had caught some rumor of the band going to be "at work" that night, yet nothing betrayed any apprehension on their part.

They had made no preparations for defence.

The dogs were chained up, and the big gate was half open.

Perhaps they feared that the least evidence of shrinking would invite an advance.

The band strode in boldly, and one or two gave the noses of the watchdogs a tap with a club to make them keep quiet, while Henri the Handsome pushed open the house door.

The farmer's family and farmhands were forming a half-circle round the fire, while on the long table were the remains of the hearty supper.

The fire and torches of pine lighted up the place.

At the entrance of the bandit chief, well known like his followers to the beholders, everybody stopped talking or eating or drinking, as the case might be.

All the people turned white as ghosts, and some of them rose automatonically to offer their seats.

Henri the Handsome, with the action of a man pretty sure that anything he did was allowable, stepped up to the table and lifted a cider jug to his lips.

His fellows imitated his act and cleared the board, without one word, much less an excuse, being addressed.

Nevertheless, beside the old master of the house, there were his two stout sons and four more young men of similar build, who might have given the intruders a busy time of it with their cudgels and the fowling pieces which hung on their hooks.

The half dozen robust girls of the house and dairy were not to be despised in a fight, either.

But not a soul among them seemed to dream of resistance, but dwelt speechless, and motionless.

The farmer, at first taken all aback by the unexpected inroad, recovered somewhat.

With exaggerated politeness, he poured out :

"Goodness me ! it's citizen Henri, and my dear Acrobat the Thumbless—and the Big Norman, and the Doctor, too ! Lord ! quite a meeting of friends ! Sit down, bless me, sit down ! eat a drop and drink a slice or two of bread ! Here, wife, and you, you staring hussies ! look alive, in the name of old Nick. stir your stumps, you jades ! some ham, clean plates, wine, cider ! I'll bet my head that Henri the Handsome and his gan—his friends, I mean, will take a sup of our home-brewed beer !"

The poor women, jumping up electrified, began to run about at randoin, without knowing what they did.

With an imperious wave of the hand, Henri nailed them all to the floor, like statues.

"Useless. We are expected and cannot stay."

His companions were finishing more cider.

"What ! going so quick, just like the angels !" said the farmer in an affected regret. "If you are in a hurry, though, Citizen Henri, don't let us detain you with our humble fare. It comes from the heart, though, from the heart."

Half the band had already stalked out smacking their lips like coachwhips.

The farmer, seeing he was going to get off cheaply this time, followed the captain and the rest and, like a countryman of those parts, tried to gain something else.

"I may as well tell you, Doctor," said he to the lieutenant so nicknamed, in an insinuating voice, "that my white cow Blanche is still sick—look in on us and give us a dose for her, that's a kind fellow. You know so many secrets of curing men that you must be able to cure a cow !"

The Doctor, flattered exceedingly, went out, nodding.

This promise obtained, Farmer Marchet presumed still further.

As the last of his unwelcome visitors left, he stood in his doorway, cap in hand, and raised his voice to say loudly :

"And won't you be so kind, citizen Henri the Handsome, to pass the word for your good people not to take *all* the fowls out of the poultry-house this Christmas week like last ! Don't be hard on a neighbor ! They only left me one old rooster last year that the fox wouldn't take !"

The farmer had gone too far.

"'Sailor Boy,' or whoever's nearest there," cried Henri, "*send that chatter box to sleep.*"

One of the rear-guard swung his club in the air and knocked the old man into the house, dead as a stone.

The robbers paid no further attention to him, when suddenly a young man's voice shouted within the doorway as one of the murdered man's sons lifted the corpse :

"To arms ! Close the shutters ! We will have help from the soldiers soon. The guns, the guns !"

The brigands, half out of the court-yard, paused instinctively.

Bang ! went a shot and one of the robbers leaned against the wall ; his arm had been broken by the bullet.

One of the orphan brothers stood in the doorway with the smoking-piece.

"Back !" yelled Henri, forgetting all at this. "They have brought it on themselves ! In, and make mincemeat of them !"

But the farmhands, having broken the spell, and having strong oaken planks between them and the robbers were not the terrified swains of other days.

They felt assured that the noise of a conflict would bring them aid soon, for they had seen the numbers of troops pouring into Saint Maurice.

They were good rabbit hunters, and a man who can hit puss, can easily

bring down a man, and their four guns killed each their man at the next rush of the brigands.

The fight was fairly inaugurated.

One corner of the farmhouse was fired, however, and the flames spread rapidly in the cold dry air.

At this juncture, there came running up the hill one of the connections of the gang, who had seen the soldiers assembling on the village-square to proceed to the conflagration.

With a last volley, to which the peasants responded, the foiled bandit called off his men, angry now that he should have let his grander project be thus turned aside.

They reached the woods before the hussars and foot soldiers came up the hill.

The latter spent the night in searching for them fruitlessly.

As the sun set the next day over the quarries, the robbers were assembled in groups in the old haunt, singing, dancing and otherwise making merry.

They showed no tokens of the previous evening's defeat, unlike their chief who sat apart under a tree.

As he was sulking and chafing, one of the videttes cried out the "who goes there?" which was repeated by many others.

A sound approached, and soon grew into a medley of outcries of pain and oaths.

At length, several men appeared with a burden, which they laid rather gently on the sward.

"Where is Baptist?" shouted one of the bearers, "where's that rascally doctor? Fetch him along quick for a wounded man?"

"A wounded man?" repeated Henri the Handsome, aroused from his reverie, "by all the devils, their horns and their hoofs! is no one to have a moment's repose? Who is hurt now?"

"It looks the very picture of the Big Norman sprawled out there howling like a sick hog," answered the 'Sailor Boy.' "Come on, fellows, and see the fun."

He ran to the spot with others.

The chief himself hastened after.

A few only were too drunk to have any thought except for the dance.

The Big Norman was indeed extended on the ground, groaning and cursing by turns.

He had been out with another knave, called the Red-eyed of Borgny, and they had had admittance refused them in a farm-house—for the country people were becoming bold as lions since soldiers were in the district to back them—and had had a gun fired at them, of which the present sufferer had received the charge in his breast and shoulders.

He was covered with blood and was in great agony.

The Sailor Boy bent over the sufferer with the joy of satisfied hate.

"Ha, ha! my poor buck," said he in a delighted tone, "so you're winged at last, you who are so fond of cuffing your comrades! You are pretty far gone, that's a fact! I don't think you'll kick up any more fusses! You're losing your blood, my friend, and if this keeps on, you won't have a single drop in five minutes more. Small loss!"

The Big Norman was about to put a stop to these taunts by a blow with his huge fist, but a dreadfully poignant twitch in his shoulder prevented him and kept his arm down by his side.

The Doctor had come by this time, and ordered his patient to be brought nearer the fire for him to examine him.

He was obeyed.

The Doctor, taking off the wounded man's coat, opened his box of instruments and searched for the proper probes.

The captain turned away and had nearly fallen into a new train of reflections, when a loud noise arose in the direction of the fire.

Laughs and cheers in derision were to be distinguished.

To the leader's astonishment, the Norman was seen to jump up to his feet and fall half naked upon his teasers.

The eminent Physician of the Scorchers himself, forgot the importance and dignity of that station and joined in the hilarity.

"What means all this?" demanded Captain Henri, advancing to the scene.

"It means, captain," said Sailor Boy after a side-splitting peal of merriment, "that the gun that hit the big baby was only loaded with pepper and salt."

"The wounds smart," added the Doctor, "but they are mere flea-bites."

The wounded man was glaring in rage and shame at the circle of merry faces.

"We'll, never want provisions while we have the Norman in salt!" cried one.

"A pretty pickle he is in," shouted another.

"Well peppered, indeed!" was the roar of a third.

"Salted shoulder!" chorussed a dozen.

"A bucket of water to make him fresh again!"

Meanwhile, after the chief had silenced the tormentors, he questioned the wounded man.

"Ha!" said he when he had heard all, "the kid reported that the farmer was to market. Hunt up that boy we call Little Lad (*le Petit Garr*). I want to see him."

The youth, one of the spies of the second class, had indeed played false.

When sent on the errand of finding out all about the farmhouse in question, he had found the traveling too cold and had skulked around in the warmest holes in the quarries till he had pretended to return, and had said the coast was clear.

"If I go to old Crosspatch's farm," he had reasoned in his childish way, "they'll set the dogs on me. I'll go and hide in the Greenstone Cave and roll rocks for him. Then I'll come back and swear that there's not a soul at the place. They can go and make sure of it themselves, if they like. Curse 'um! they're all the time quarrelling and have made my mother hide herself away off from here. I'll trick 'um out of spite."

This he had done.

He was soon found, being in the thicket, gnawing a piece of bread, and laughing with the laughers at the Norman.

It was only when he felt the heavy hand of the Sailor Boy on his shoulder that he began to fear.

But he uttered no word and offered no resistance to being brought before the chief.

He, though the youngest and weakest of the band, was too hardened to beatings to be much afraid.

The captain darted an angry look down on him.

"You have disobeyed me," said he, "you have lied and you've led to one of my plans being crossed. Do you deny it?"

The little fellow trembled, but he tried to clear himself by effrontery.

"Pooh! it was only for the fun of the thing."

"Ha! do you acknowledge having made a false report about the farm in the hollow?"

"It was a joke—the Big Norman was only shot with salt!"

"He might have been slain, as you deserve to be. But you are young and I may spare you. Your mother Fanchette the Tall has disappeared from our midst. Do you know where she is?"

"No, I don't," replied the boy, affecting stupidity.

"Come, speak out, or else—"

The youngster laughed in the speaker's face and made a face so comic that the audacity of it rather than its risibility caused a smile and even a smothered laugh to appear on the faces of the brigands.

But they were hushed and the boy was alarmed at the possible consequences of his temerity.

For the handsome face of Henri had grown livid, he uttered a kind of growl and felt in his girdle for a pistol which he cocked.

The youth twisted himself out of the Sailor Boy's arms, and began nimbly running towards the thicket, screaming:

"Mother, mother! help!"

Several of the brigands who might have intercepted his flight, were too much astounded to do so.

Alone, the bandit chief dashed into the foliage like a tiger infuriated.

They both disappeared in the shadows.

Active as was the terrible leader, perhaps he could not have overtaken the child, winged by fright as the latter was, over the rough ground, easier for the lesser than for the greater runner.

If the former had had the idea of dropping noiselessly behind some bush, he would have escaped the pursuer's wrath for the present at least.

But as he was in a species of fit, he ran straight on and continued to scream in his shrill voice:

"Mother, mother! help, help, my mother!"

The explosion of a firearm resounded in the wood, and was followed by a heart-rending shriek, more powerful than the boy could have uttered.

* * * * *

In the centre of a natural clearing, lighted by the rising moon which cast a long coffin-shaped beam on the group, Henri the Handsome, his pistol still in his grasp, but the hammer down in the powder-blued pan, was gazing on the boy's body dead at his feet.

A woman, with disheveled hair and torn garments was kneeling over the corpse, crying:

"Henri, you have killed *our* son!"

There she fainted, bathing her face in the blood of the child born in guilt, dead in crime!

The chilliness of the morning brought her to herself, and she rose benumbed by the night's cold.

Her mind seemed to have gone on thinking while she had been in the swoon for she was resolved when she awoke.

She disrobed the body partly, carefully put aside the clothes, and more care fully placed the remains in a hole in the rock which she built over with stones.

On the rude pile she placed a plainly made cross, murmured what she remembered of a prayer over it and stood up, the little packet of clothes in her shawl.

She looked towards the camp of the Scorchers, felt that a small pocket-pistol was safe in her bosom, and turned away, thinking:

"I will bid mother good-bye first, and then! then, will I die at *his* feet!"

She began to thread the crossing paths of the forest.

But she had miscalculated her forces.

The hard ground, too, was so unlike the elastic grass of summer that her stiffened limbs soon tired.

Still she toiled on.

Her clothes were very scant against such a morning's rigor.

To add to all, when she had arrived in the more open country, a fine hard snow was falling which pricked the exposed face like so many needles.

So hard was it that the grains would not adhere to one another like flakes

do, and, far from uniformly covering the ground, collected in ridges and heaps.
On she toiled.

Captain Vasseur had been out that night, or rather morning, with many of his men, though only two were yet with him, for the news of the robbers having been beaten off the farm and the Big Norman being shot had been received by him and he had thought he might be able to pick up the winged bird.

He had different luck.

As the three rode along, they espied coming towards them a countryman, whose three-cornered hat was pulled over his eyes against the sleet, for the riders brought the wind with them.

When they first descried him, he was a mere black speck on the white.

But as soon as he caught sight of the horsemen, which happened after a while, he did not appear to be in any hurry to make their acquaintance, for he stopped and, after a look, dropped behind a hillock, perhaps trusting that he had not been remarked.

But Captain Vasseur had observed this suspicious proceeding.

"Spur!" ordered he.

Off the three went at a fast trot.

Seeing himself discovered, the suspected man rose and cut across the fields to throw the mounted men off his track.

"Keep on his heels," commanded the officer; "I'll remain in the road and prevent him taking to it again, as he may."

As he rode along, he suddenly perceived a kind of dark blot in the middle of the highway on ahead.

It was a woman lying motionless and half covered with the drift of icy particles.

He reined in.

"Halloo! are you asleep, my good woman!"

Finding no signs of life, he dismounted and acquired certainty that the poor woman was senseless and in a fair way to lose life.

She presented a wretched aspect: her feet torn through her tattered shoes, bled slowly upon the ice; her walking-stick had fallen from her one hand, while the other and its arm stiffly encircled a small bundle.

The sleet did not melt on her face or form.

By temperament as well as by profession, Captain Vasseur was not easily affected, yet he could not help great compassion moving him on beholding the poor creature's deplorable condition.

He leaned over her with interest, shook her and called her in vain.

She did once open her eyelids the least bit, but almost instantly closed them in that slumber of death by cold.

As the officer knew now that she breathed still, he hastened to wrap her up in his ample riding-cloak, and forced a few drops of brandy between her set teeth.

He alone, and there, could not altogether accomplish the resuscitation.

He looked around him.

His companions were far off, still pursuing the three-cornered hat.

Besides, they would not have been of any utility under the circumstances.

Fortunately, not very distant from the spot, was a little cabin hidden in the leafless brush, yet denoted by the smoke curling out of the chimney.

Its ragged straw thatch indicated no great wealth, but Vasseur did not hesitate to take up the unconscious woman and stride up to the cottage, as rapidly as his heavy boots with his spurs would let him.

His horse followed him like the well-trained steed he was.

The house was very comfortable, after all, on a nearer view.

The garden had been well under cultivation.

Beehives were carefully sheltered by a wall, a goat, tied up, was bleating and a cow was bellowing in the stable.

Vasseur tied up his horse to the palings and walked into the cottage without knocking.

An old woman was within slowly turning a spinning-wheel.

On seeing what had happened and being instructed by the officer's sharp words, she sprang up and cheerfully enlarged the fire, made a hot posset of wine.

On coming to chafe and warm the poor woman's hands, she uttered a loud scream which astonished the captain.

"Fanchette, Fanchette! Good heavens, my daughter!" cried she, falling on her knees, "She was dying, and you bring her to me, to me! How strange! See, she's coming to—she opens her eyes!" continued the old woman. "She lives!"

In fact, Fanchette's features lost their pallor by degrees and she became more and more animated.

But there was a fear that the sudden reaction would give her a fever.

They put her to bed with all the blankets on her.

The captain had meantime examined the bundle, which contained a boy's clothes.

He believed for a moment that they had been stolen, poor as they were, when a weak voice raved from under the coverings:

"My boy, my son! where are you? Oh, he killed him because he would not steal!"

These words, betokening a return of sense but not of command over the brain, struck the mother with alarm and the officer with suspicion and amazement.

"She's mad! she's mad!" cried the old woman quickly. "Her boy died long ago when a babe."

But Franchette had sat up and looking at Captain Vasseur turning over the contents of the bundle, said earnestly.

"Please, please don't touch 'em, sir. They're all that's left of my good little child!"

"The deuce! Ha! a babe wear the clothes of a boy of twelve!" cried Vasseur.

What he would next have done is doubtful, but whatever his intended move, he was interrupted by hasty footfalls heard outside.

The back door of the cottage opened, and in rushed a man, with just enough breath to gasp:

"Kind folks, I am hunted. Don't give me up!"

Vasseur promptly caught him by the collar and said:

"One moment, my man. I want a talk with you."

Nothing could equal the stupor of the stranger on perceiving his leap from the frying-pan into the fire.

But he tried to escape nevertheless.

The officer's hold was too good and his hand too strong for that to be accomplished.

The Red-Eyed of Borgny, for this was the companion of the Big Norman found that cunning was his only resource.

He sat down on a stool beside the captain with affected resignation.

"Good heavens! citizen officer, what can you want with me, hunting me over the country as you have. I am a poor inoffensive soul, who cannot guess why I am so troubled. Here's my paper."

He handed Vasseur a greasy scrip, which the latter scarcely deigned a glance.

"Oh, I suppose it's all right, my good Germain Bouscant, otherwise the Red-Eyed of Borgny, who called at the farm in the hollow last night along with a gigantic knave."

The start of the rogue at this abrupt accusal confirmed its truth.

"Look here, sirrah, your sudden flight at sight of our uniforms is proof enough for your being guilty, your character apart of vagabond, beggar and what not. So I cannot let you go——"

"But I am innocent as a lamb."

"I arrest you in the name of the Law. It will be better for you," said the captain, fixing his penetrative eyes on his shuddering prisoner, "to cease your useless lies and lamentations and gain the indulgence of the authorities by making a clean breast of it. The government is stirring at last. The National Guard is arming, and the regulars are coming in from all quarters. There's no hope for the Scorchers."

The brigand was shaken, for he knew this was true.

"They are lost. The first ones who come in will be granted life, however guilty they may have been. Besides, a reward will be added to whoever tells who is the skilful chief of the band."

"A reward?" exclaimed the Red-Eyed.

"A considerable sum."

The brigand was convinced, and he was about opening his mouth, when he was interrupted by a woman's voice.

"Traitor! coward! liar! woe to you if you sell *him*!"

The brigand looked at the bed.

"Hullo! Franchette the Tall! and her mother Old Caduque! What does this mean?"

"It means that you had better be quick, or others will forestall you," interpolated the officer quickly.

"No, no, he lies!" screamed Franchette, struggling with her wrappings and her mother. "I won't betray *him*! He has led to all my shame and agony! he hates me and has killed my boy! but I won't betray him, and won't have anybody else do it! I have loved him and love him still!"

"You speak of a murdered child," said Captain Vasseur, "avenge him by——"

"Peace! Cut me in bits—you shall not know *him*. My poor, poor little one!"

Meanwhile, Germain had come to the conclusion that Franchette would let out the secret in her ravings, if not wittingly, determined on his course.

"My word of honor for what I promise," said the officer.

"Well, then," began the traitor, "I will reveal all about our association. To begin with and to prove my knowledge, the leader, the Chief of the Scorchers is known to us as Henri the Handsome, to the world as——"

A sharp crack of a pistol echoed in the room, and the speaker, with one eye sightless, for therein the tiny bullet had buried itself, fell into the officer's arms, dead.

The smoke filled the room.

There was a confused moment.

Captain Vasseur made a spring to seize the slayer, but it was the old mother and not Franchette that he grasped.

The door opened and a cold blast rushed in while the mistress of the bandit leader flew out.

In another moment, a clatter of hoofs were audible.

"The devil!" thundered the officer, flinging from him the old woman, who rolled over the dead traitor.

And he dashed into the open air.

On one side approached his two soldiers; on the other disappeared, on her horse, the fevered Franchette, riding at full speed.

"No use chasing!" said he, seeing that she was country-girl enough to have acquired tolerable horsemanship. "Give me your horse, Bandoni, while you arrest an old woman inside this house and see if a man is dead."

The man was dead.

But if he was not to reveal the important secrets, another took his place.

Old Caduque, on promise of mercy being extended to her child, began to make known her acquaintance with the band of Orgares, as she rode in front of the captain.

The chase was really begun at this moment.

Darkness was again upon the forest.

Its edge was being penetrated by a large body of soldiers, horse and foot, under command of Captain Vasseur, who guided his little army in accordance with what he had learnt from Old Caduque.

It was a difficult task, and many a time he had almost given it up.

But at last, the appearance of a changing red glimmer gave all heart.

"The fire of the wretches' camp," said he, aloud. "Cautious, now, men! The curses of all honest men befall him who is hindmost at this pinch!"

The brigands were in their great cavern, on account of the cold.

A fire burned before its large mouth to heat the air that entered it.

They were all up and excitement, for not only had the news that Fanchette had brought on the stolen horse been confirmed by spies, but the last arrival had told of the approaching army, and of the complete confession of Old Caduque.

Fanchette was pardoned by the chief for her services and she had gone to sleep in a corner, almost happy.

The fright of the villains knew no bounds.

They would have rushed out of the cave, but that Captain Henri stood between them and the aperture.

"Let none of ye stir!" said he, growling in rage. "You're a pack of cowards! Do you dare go against your leader's will?"

He drew a brace of pistols.

"I'll unroof the skull of the first who rebels!"

He thought they were more of soldiers; they were mere cut-throats.

His attitude silenced their murmurings, and he endeavored to overawe or decide them again.

But they were listening not to him, but to the tramp of armed men which they fancied they heard.

Time was too precious for such hesitation to be prolonged.

As the commander paused, exhausted by his own vehemence, Sailor Boy made himself spokesman and began:

"Let us go, captain! You see we're a demoralized set! We'll be nabbed at a swoop with all this palaver."

"Yes, yes! aye, aye! speak to him, Sailor!" vociferated the farthestmost of the crowd.

"But I will not have you scatter like thistle-seed! Am I not your chief?"

"Oh, that's all bosh—our gang's broken up," returned Sailor Boy, emboldened by the nudges and pattings on the shoulder that he received. "Come now, stash that! our lives go ahead of our laws!"

"Hur—!" they began to cheer.

But Henri's voice broke in.

"By all the horns of the devil, here you go on a voyage, my Sailor Boy!"

His pistol shot tore the ear of the rebel, and entered the throat of the man behind him.

The brigand chief, changed his exploded weapon for the other, but he was not let use it.

They rushed upon him altogether and upset him in a twinkling, notwithstanding the increase of his natural powers by fury.

A blanket was spread over his face to prevent him seeing who were the principals in the revolution of time-honored authority and many hands held him down.

He struggled fruitlessly.

At length, he felt the many grasps relax and be removed, but he was bound hand and foot with ropes.

His assailants were moving away.

He attempted to break free, but unsuccessfully.

In a little while, a small hand impatiently cut his bonds and pulled off the cloth blindfolding him.

It was Fanchette.

He paid little attention to her, for his rage overcame his gratitude.

The pistol which he had not fired off, lay on the ground, as if no one had dared to touch it.

He caught it up, rushed through the opening and leaped over the dying fire.

Only a few boys and old women were in the neighborhood, and they were unworthy of his vengeance.

“Henri, Henri!” screamed Fanchette, “what are you going to do?”

But he had seen his men running off or mounting stolen horses which they had taken out of the stable-cave.

“Cowards! only wait!” roared he more like a wild beast than a human being.

“The chief!” exclaimed the Sailor Boy in terror. “Confound whoever let him loose!”

Off they spurred, the shot following them uselessly.

All of a sudden, like echoes to that report, detonations broke the stillness on several sides of the wood.

After a few minutes, some of the bandit on foot began to return to the haunt, while the musketry began to rattle.

The soldiers had surrounded the wood.

Henri the Handsome thought no longer of punishing the rebels, who, indeed, were being summarily dealt with.

He grasped Fanchett's hand and the two pushed through the underwood, as Captain Vasseur and his men beat back the robbers in all quarters.

The two fugitives managed to get through the lines and left the spot by some yards, when three soldiers started up before them.

“Halt!” cried one. “A move, and you die!”

The brigand chief stopped but almost instantly sprang forward.

The piece flashed in the pan.

He was only a few feet from the soldier, who attempted to club his musket, but Henri was too close and had him by the hair.

He bent back his head and was about to cut his throat, when the other soldiers fired at him.

One bullet missed him, the other only went through and through the cords between the shoulder and the neck and then struck Fanchette in the bosom, as she came on to save her lover.

“I forgive—I Henri! my ch—”

She breathed her last as the soldiers pinioned their prisoner.

They let her lie there while they led their captives to their commander.

The open space in front of the cave lighted up by the fire which had been replenished, was full of dead, dying, and bound bandits, over whom the soldiers stood triumphant guard. As soon as Henri the Handsome could get speech, he begged Captain Vasseur to let him see Peursans the magistrate.

“Here he is,” said the officer coldly.

“What does *the prisoner* want?” inquired the magistrate equally icily.

“A word in private,” answered Henri, downcast considerably by this manner.

“What?” said the bandit chief, turning pale.

“I am a nobody at present,” returned the magistrate, turning away. “Captain Vasseur is about to take you to Chartres.”

"Not till I repay your affection, kinsman of mine!" cried Henri the Handsome with a return of his daring voice of old.

By strength as well as by a trick well known by galley slaves, the speaker had freed his hands and drawn from his clothes a little needle of a dagger which he had known how to conceal from his searchers.

But his feet were hampered and — though Peursans was unsuspicious — Captain Vasseur had been on the alert. In an instant, the brigand was overpowered and disarmed.

* * * * *

Notwithstanding the thinning out by jail-fever which visited the numerous culprits, and several escapes, eighty shot was the number of the Band of Scorchers brought to trial and to sentence of death and imprisonment.

Of the twenty-three who were adjudged to the extreme penalty, the chief was naturally the foremost.

He died "handsomely," as the French criminals who envy his daring life, jestingly say to this day.

CHAPTER XXV

TURN PIRATE.—SAN FRANCISCO.—HOW GARCIA SPENT HIS TIME.

ONE Sunday morning, very fine, as the bells were calling Catholics to mass and the no-religionists to amusements, and the men, generally fresh shaven and in their "store-clothes," were mustering at the corners to watch the women pass and criticise feet and ankles, they saw a man go by who was a stranger.

He was a good-looking young man of black eyes and hair, which floated down his shoulders. He rode along tranquilly, regarding with indifference even such things as demanded inspection. He was so richly attired, and bestrode a horse so good and so elegantly bedecked that he was the cynosure ere long of all eyes and the subject of general remarks.

"Handsome! Look at him!" murmured the ladies. "Some young Mexican can noble! General Vallejo's son! No, the general has no son."

"I swear! he is gallus!" said a New Yorker.

"I reckon that chap will dew!" remarked a Bay State man.

"Thunder! couldn't shine more if he had a plantation to back him!" observed a Southerner.

The young horseman, apparently unconscious of having drawn all eyes upon him, drew rein suddenly on passing before a board fence on which were posted several handbills. One of them, more prominent than the others of "Great Bargains! New York Goods at Cost! French Silk Scarfs, all colors!" was thus lettered:

\$5,000.—REWARD.—\$5,000.

Five thousand dollars Reward to whoever delivers to the authorities,
JOAQUIN,

DEAD OR ALIVE!

The Mexican cavalier had no sooner read this than he leaped off his horse, drew out a lead pencil, scribbled rather leisurely some words on the foot of the bill and rode on as quietly as if he had not stopped. A dozen people, urged by curiosity, hastened up to the fence to see what had been written, and they read:

"I'll give ten thousand dollars,

JOAQUIN."

Fancy the exclamations of astonishment which hailed this sight. Nothing was spoken about throughout the week except this event, at least among the ladies.

Every one of them had remarked, "a something, my dear, about his eyes,"

that was suspicious, and according to their account, as they had known Joaquin from the first, he owed his safety to a silence not generally classed with their gifts.

The daredevil freak in which the outlaw had indulged, did not prevent him returning to the town every now and then in different disguises, to learn personally what was going on.

He found out one evening that a little craft was going to leave Stockton for San Francisco, at a certain hour.

A couple of miners from Campo Seco in Calaveras County, were the passengers, bearing with them the gold which they purposed enjoying in the States.

Joaquin took with him three of his men whom he found roving about the city and, getting into a small boat, they shoved off and proceeded to hide themselves in the tule rushes under one bank.

The mosquitoes were so plaguing that it almost made him give up the plan but, on reflecting, the perspective of a magnificent gain made him persevere in his original idea.

He regretted that none of them had brought matches, for then they might have kindled a fire to drive off the gallinippers, and he was on the point of flashing some powder and thus procuring fire when the fear of the flames being descried, annulled that scheme.

Three long, long hours crawled by.

At length, they espied the sloop, which, very crank, leaned over daintily and brushed the ripple gently though rapidly.

When she had approached the ambush, on which she nearly bore during a tack, the waiters pushed out, reached the side of the vessel just when her crew of two were busy holding the helm and foresheet respectively when she went about, and fired at them.

They dropped disabled or dead, on the deck.

At the ominous sounds of the detonation and of the double fall, the two passengers rushed out of the little cabin, weapon in hand.

But the conflict was unequal.

The six shots rang out almost together, two of Joaquin's men were slain, but three bullets entered one of the miners and another the other, and they breathed their last.

Joaquin and his surviving comrade relieved the corpses of their belts of gold and valuables, and, finding some matches in the cabin, set fire to the sloop, after lashing fast the helm and letting the sails down by the run.

When the morning came, there was no trace of the crime to speak of; a scorched hulk lay at the bottom of the stream and the earth began to cake up against it to form another bar, some tinder had been blown into the woods and even kindled a pitchy bough here and there, some rope twined and lashed about in the eddy, and bits of wood, a sweep and a water-breaker bobbed up and down on the current, and that was all.

Twelve thousand dollars was in the hands of the robbers.

On the next day, after having sent Three-fingered Jack to the head-quarters with four more men, Murieta took Valenzuela with him to Sacramento.

They stayed there about a week before sailing to San Francisco, where they arrived at about eleven in the evening.

They slashed through the bad streets and gloom, until they had come to a house in Pacific Street near Dupont.

At the door they thundered for all of a quarter of an hour, when it was opened a little.

"Who is there?" whispered a voice.

"Friends, Senor Blanco," was the reply, "good friends, too!"

"Oh, I recognize you, my paysanos," returned the voice; "come in, come in! I've been expecting you some time!"

"You don't say?" queried Valenzuela, entering after his superior, while Señor Blanco closed the door behind them and carefully fastened it. "How could you be expecting us when you are no magician to see into the future."

"Unless you have had a visit of Old Nick from Monte Diablo yonder," added Joaquin.

"No, no, nothing of that sort. My information came from no other devi than one of your company. Come along and I will show you the man himself, though I hardly think he will recognize you as easily, for he has been dead drunk during the last forty-eight hours. A rough customer he is! When I heard you knock, I thought you were the enemy and I made a shift to arouse him, which kept you waiting so long."

"Very well; but who is this man of ours?" inquired the captain.

"Come and see for yourselves," answered Blanco. "This way—here we are. Here's the door! I ain't surprised that you don't know my house when you have not been here for so long. It has been burnt down since then, too, but I had it rebuilt pretty nearly the same way. There's the man now!"

Joaquin and his lieutenant had entered a rather large room. They stopped and looked around.

"Where?"

"Why, on the floor."

The captain took the lamp off the table and held it over a recumbent form.

"It's Garcia! he here!" exclaimed he, starting back.

"Yes," replied Blanco. "He told me that you ordered him to go to the main rendezvous, but as he had some money in his pocket he came here to go on the 'tear'."

"Let's see if he cannot be awakened," said Valenzuela.

He went up to the drunkard and gave him sundry shoves and blows which, far from producing the anticipated effect, only drew from the three-fingered cut-throat deep growls and broken oaths! "Cara—or Caram—"

Knowing that watching Garcia was out of the question, and yet fearing, if his actions were not circumscribed that he would compromise them, Joaquin took the course of avoiding him as much as was possible while he should be in the city.

For this purpose, he bought a tent and put it up on one of the hillocks not far from the Fremont House, near Battery and Vallejo Streets.

Every night, he and Valenzuela left their retreat to go the rounds of the Bella Union, Diana, El Dorado and other exhibition-places of the tiger to be fought. They lost and won piles of gold with a calmness and good humor even which delighted the lookers-on, players or mere "lunchers" on the spread side-boards, and the bankers themselves, who are not, as everybody knows who has tilted on the field of the cloth of green, the most impressionable of men.

One evening as the pair were sauntering into the Bella Union, and about to take seats at a faro-table, their attention was suddenly drawn to another table, round which were packing a great number of the curious to see an interesting game of monte. They stepped over to it, too, and beheld Mr. Mannet Garcia, otherwise Three-fingered Jack, facing them, with five or six thousand dollars before him.

He had just lost about the same sum, and the banker was unconcernedly shuffling the cards for a fresh game.

Out came a king and a deuce which he placed side by side on the board.

Jack, without hesitation, staked all he had on the court card. The dealer continued to throw out the cards, and took in the two-spot; in a few seconds all was over.

The rake encircled and pulled away the pile of gold before the player, without the least symptom of a smile appearing on the banker's cheek.

Nor did the loser express any more emotion. He called for a glass of

brandy, swallowed it down to the last two drops and went out of the saloon without having spoken a word.

The captain and his companion had not been remarked by him.

They remained an hour or so in the place, going from table to table, losing a good deal here, winning a very little there, and had no adventure.

Then they proceeded to Jackson Street, to a Mexican ball where they found a large assemblage of their countrymen and women, who were bobbing up and down in an atmosphere of smoke and dust, to the jingling and thumping of a tamborine, to the scraping of a fiddle and the screak of a cracked flute.

They mingled with the throng and passed some time there.

It was a little after two in the morning when the two bandits quitted the bar-room to return to their canvas domicile. Joaquin had lost at play so large a sum that his comrade and himself could only find on them a hundred dollars, an insignificant sum to men who had in a week at full spring sent ten or twelve thousand dollars adrift. Valenzuela proposed to push on to the San Jose Mission, where they had an ally who would not hesitate to loan them any amount in thousands for a fair interest.

Joaquin would not follow this advice for reasons which he had, and preferred to return to Sacramento, where the horses had remained in the keeping of one Padrillo.

While passing a shanty on the road, they heard suddenly a clamor of oaths, exclamations and bursts of laughter.

They turned back and went by, and did this again and again, until finally hearing nothing but silence, as an Irishman might say, that made them all the more curious and they stopped to listen.

"I'll swear that was Garcia speaking," said Joaquin, who had especially noted one of his worthy satellite's favorite execrations.

The two began to peer through a couple of the many chinks in the miserably put together planks of the establishment.

Thus they could see pretty well a scene full of interest to them, while nobody within had a thought of them.

Through the cloudy air of the room full of the vapors from forty-rod rum, cheapest whiskey and pipes, the witnesses beheld several clusters of men each around a table of the half dozen, their aspect setting them down with photographic accuracy as the most depraved and vicious of off-scourings of the city, men, if they deserved the title, ready for anything, and the worst the better.

Every one of the tables had its deck of cards, and every individual had a huge tin mug or cup, into which he was often pouring his ordered beverage, the chief being whatever poison it was that was in a couple of kegs in the corner.

A smouldering fire every now and anon collected sufficient energy to dart up a flame which danced around impishly on the faces of the outcasts, while overhead, a half dozen ends of candles, cheap fifty-cent dips, sputtered and fought with the thieves in their gutters, as if giving a lesson thus vigorously to quiescent society.

Between these upper and lower regions of feeble illumination, reigned a fog that would have delighted a Londoner and made his northern neighbor recall the Scotch mist.

At one of the tables, farthest from the fire, were seated four of the most villainous. One was no other than the illustrious Jack of the Three-fingers, whose eyes were glaring most frightfully. His companions were Pedro Sanchez, Juan Borilda and Joaquin Blanco, all three affiliated to the band in the honorable office of spies, the first exercising that position around Stockton and Columbia, the second at Stockton and the third at the San Luis Obisque Mission.

The other groups were composed of English, Irish and American, who all seemed to have drank more than they ought, but who, from that very reason were imbibing more than ever.

Notwithstanding the tumult which arose in the rough concourse, the two eaves-droppers could distinctly hear some sentences carelessly thundered by Mister Jack, which surprised his commander not a little.

"You have had all you deserve," cried Garcia, "and I'll see you in h—before I'll come down with a dollar more. Confound you, there was only a figure six of thousands, and every man Jack of you fingered his thousand, Caramba! by the flames and pitch forks of purgatory! did you think I was going to divide even with you, when all you had to do and did do was leave the fellow alone and I did for him. Share and share alike, hey? You go to grass! I'll dig my claim alone after this."

As the stamp is put on the sealing wax, so the speaker gave the table such a vigorous thump with a mallet-like fist that the cards jumped up and danced as if they were playing old *sledge* of themselves.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BLACK DIAMOND CUTS BLACK DIAMOND.—MORE TO HEAR.—THE POLICEMEN ARE TOO LATE AS USUAL.—THE BOGUS JOAQUIN.—MORE BLOOD.

WHILE noisy Garcia was thus emphatic, a scene no less momentous was transpiring at the other end of the palatial shanty. One of the drinkers at that part, after having studied with inebriate's gravity the speech he had heard, rose and went as if only to the fire, blunderingly lit a cigar while carefully scrutinizing the Three-fingered desperado with as much astonishment as his muddled senses could let him feel, and staggered back to his companions, into whose ears he whispered a few startling words.

They were no common ones, for six of the eight there seated, rose and reeled out.

Murieta and his lieutenant, followed them easily in the obscurity; the drunken men, though made sober by the cool outer air, were so intent on their sudden purpose that they minded their watchers no more than they did the rats that leaped out of the hollows in the rotten planking called the sidewalk.

Thinking intently and quite correctly that three-fingered Jack had something to do with the abrupt departure of the seven, the two Mexicans let them enter undisturbed their tent, when they stepped up to it and listened easily through the canvas.

They had drawn and set the hammers of their revolvers in case they should be set upon.

"Did you take a good squint at him?" asked one of the men inside.

"A first rate one, so good that I will remember him as long as my stick is uncut."

"But are you sure it is that man?"

"Look a' here, I can't be chiseled on that, no how you fix it! I have seen him many and many a time up in the mountains and, as sure as a gun, it is Three-fingered Jack, one of the top-sawyers of Joaquin's cut-throats. And I'll go as X besides that the old buck himself, Joaquin, is in town, for one is always hanging around the other. They are jess like the pilot fish and shark we saw in the Gulf coming out here in the Golden Gate. Anyway, those three ugly mugs with him are of the band, I'll bet."

"Thin O'll till yees fwat, me lads," said a third, "it explins all, be the powers! there's not a bit o' wonder that we made Paddy Fitzsimmon's mothers o' oursel's las' noit, and missed our game, bedad!"

"What do you mean, Redny?"

"Shure yees ought to know. I mane the moiner that we ought to have nailed he digger wid the pockets haping wid goold galore! This three-fingered Jack, as yees stoyle him, is the omadhaun who slipped in nately an' robbed us, be Jabers! An' that's the mystery, I'd go bail!"

"By jingo, maybe that's so! I shouldn't wonder if the miners you speak of were taken care of, that way. But it couldn't have been any great shakes of a robbery, for I saw our birds drop feathers and feathers of 'slugs,' at the arcade monte tables. To blazes and blackness with the Mexicans! Here they are leaving the woods and mountains to meddle with us in the city, r-r-rot em!"

We must do the speaker the justice to declare him quite truthful in his indignation.

"That's me all over," grumbled another. "Deuce take the yellow bellies. What brings the cursed greasers here? Here's five days and nights that we have been on the lay; and we may lay down and kick the bucket before we'll make a raise!"

"Shure the man's truth-telling," interposed "Redny," shaking the head which had gained him the nickname as solemnly as if he were assenting to the profoundest of philosophical axioms.

"I'll give you my pinion," went on the man interrupted by the exile of Erin. "We must make hash of these interlopers. When we've cleared them out, we will have all to ourselves."

"So, you mean a sudden muss with 'em—"

"No, no, 'Legs,' none of that. You're loony to think of fighting 'em. Of course, we could lick 'em, though they are uncommon h—with the knife, but it wouldn't pay, d' you see. What I propose is: let's set the peelers on their track, and if they can't root 'em out, we'll come into play and hunt up Joaquin. You know there's a reward out for him and when we get him—"

"When! don't count your gold till it's minted—"

"Dry up, Dodger, will you? Or else Joaquin won't be the first to get a wipe with my knife. You are blind drunk, you fool. As I was a saying just now when Clumsy shoved in his roar, where we get Joa—"

"Who do you call fool and clumsy! I'll teach you—"

"Will you shut? I'll—"

"No, you won't. I can lick—"

"Take that!"

A slap was heard.

"And you that, you bloody—"

And the peculiar, awful sound of a well-struck knife passing through clothes to bury itself in a human body, accompanied the words.

Dodger had stabbed his mate.

On the instant all the others sprang upon the assassin and as noisy and exciting a struggle as ever took place in a circle of ten or twelve feet in diameter and covered with canvas, thereupon ensued. As Joaquin and his friends did not care to see the upshot of the scuffle, they left their stand of observation and proceeded towards their own tent.

They were born for adventures that night.

A few steps only from the Fremont House, they encountered a couple of men, convicts who had quitted Botany Bay without applying for tickets of leave, who were fresh from the taverns. They were both primed and charged deeply, and just at the quarrelsome period.

"Hullo! what in 'ell's this 'ere chap? shouted one of them, stopping before Joaquin.

"'Ow's a fellow to know, matey?"

"Mind your own business and pass on," said Joaquin.

"No sarse or I'll—"

Before he could do anything with the weapon to which he carried his hand, he fell to the ground, with his poisoned breath forming his last gasp. Murieta's dagger had entered its full length in his side.

His companion, sobered by the sight, recoiled and took to his legs, followed by a bullet from Valenzuela, but he disappeared untouched.

The two Mexicans resumed their march peacefully as if nothing had taken place, when they unexpectedly confronted a policeman, who had heard the shot and demanded the reason of it. Joaquin slouched his hat over his face for precaution's sake, shook his arm free from his ample cloak and carelessly laid his hand on his revolver. But, seeing a second person coming up, and suspecting him to be another policeman, he responded in a polite tone :

"The shot was by accident, sir. My friend here was putting his revolver in its case when the trigger or hammer caught in the strap and it went off somehow or other."

"What made you run so quick?" asked the second policeman of his comrade.

"Oh, nothing. I heard a shot and thought it another murder," replied he, and he added, turning to Joaquin : "You say your friend was putting up his revolver—what made him have it out?"

"He was carrying it in his hand, sir. There are too many rascals around at this late hour for there to be no danger in the streets. My friend wanted to be ready."

"Why didn't he keep the Colt in his hand?"

"Because I laughed him out of his fears and told him that the police were so active in *this quarter* that the rogues had been pretty well thinned out!"

The policemen felt merciful all of a sudden, but he continued his cross-questioning, a delightful occupation to many men in office.

"But you were just now telling us there *was* danger in the streets," said he, putting the poser with the tone of a Choate. "You are so *prevaricative* (how he did rattle out the new word, a pet one, no doubt!) that I don't know whether to believe you or not."

"I beg your pardon, sir, I meant that weapons were not needed till the danger appeared."

"What do you think, Charley? Won't it be best to arrest 'em—there are so many rascallions about, indeed, though *our* ward is so-so. And the wind to-night is just the thing for incendiaries and the time seems up for another Great Fire. I think it will be prudent to hold them."

"No, I don't think so myself. Let 'em alone, they're all right. Ned, you are too cheeky altogether. You are as lippy as a Tombs' Shyster who's fingered a knuck's fee."

"I know what I say, never fear."

"I hope so, you're sure thing for judge next election!"

"Shut up! You're worse than Billy Milligan. You who fire off six-shooters so clumsily, be off to bed. *A rest* is better than arrest, remember. Come along, Charley, we'll look into Neil's and have a whiskey skin."

"That's me."

Joaquin politely bade the worthy guardians good night and went off with his companion in the direction of the rum-shop where they had seen Three-fingered Jack.

"If that stupid had persisted in talking of marching us along to the lock up," remarked the bandit chief, "I'd have left a place vacant in the force."

"So would I, for the other," added Valenzuela.

The uproar which resounded inside the shanty was sufficient to prove that his drinking continued. Joaquin looked through a crevice again and perceived the man still in the same place but so drunk that he had much ado to keep his head up, and it did fall forward every little while. Murieta charged Valenzuela to watch outside, entered the drinking-place, strode straight up to the

table and roughly shook his lieutenant by the shoulder. Garcia rose furiously and felt for his revolver.

"Oh! Murieta!"

"Hush! Come! I want you to leave this town before dawn."

"What for? what's the row?"

"Because the hounds are on our trail and in a few minutes perhaps you will be nabbed."

"Caramba! that just suits this child. How many are going to try to take me?" said he stoutly.

"Too many for us to resist them when they will have a thousand citizens to back them. Come along!"

"Have it your own way."

He rolled out of the place, followed by his three companions.

Joaquin conducted all his men to Blanco's house, where they slept till dawn; then he sent away the Blanco, namesake of the host, to San Luis, and directed Borilda and Sanchez to regain their respective haunts. Three-fingered Jack was told to take the San Jose Road and make a bee-line for the general rendezvous.

In the afternoon of the same day, the chief and Valenzuela took passage for Sacramento where they found their horses all right. Thence they started forthwith for Stockton in order to give Borilda some necessary orders relating to other members of the band, who were to reach Arroyo Cantuva *via* Stockton.

Three or four days after Joaquin's departure, rumor had it in San Franciscan street that the celebrated Marauder of the Mines had been arrested and was caged in the jail.

A poor devil of a Mexican had indeed been caught who had been profiting under Murieta's name.

A number of sight-seers rushed to the prison to feast on the dish of bandit served in his jacket, potato fashion, and probably were as well satisfied as if they had seen the Simon Pure.

All this time, the latter was on his undisturbed travels.

Three-fingered Jack had stolen a magnificent horse with fine saddle and bridle and silver spurs from a rich Mexican who lived near the Dolores Mission; next he cut the throat of a Chinaman near Alviso in addition to despoiling him of his blankets and clothes; so with one James Walsh, around the San Jose Mission.

This latter murder gave him three hundred and fifty dollars, a gold watch and a revolver.

Two Mexican rancheros suspected of this deed, were taken to San Francisco, but they were lucky enough to be let off as they deserved.

A week later, another pride of the Pirates of the Placers, Rafael Quintara, stabbed at Santiago, near Columbia, a man who had never harmed him in the least, a most respectable citizen. This inexplicable assassination excited the deepest indignation all over the country.

The energetic detective John Leary went in pursuit of the criminal; but he lost him in the intricacies of the mountain.

On the next day or the next after that, Quintara came out of his hiding-place and knifed one Samuel Slater, from whom he took some specimens of ore, two revolvers and provisions. It was only days after that the body was discovered half eaten by coyotes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BAND BEGINS TO LESSEN.—THE SPUR TO REVENGE.—THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE END.

AFTER having ravaged the country for many weeks and scattered desolation and mourning among the population who could not find an enemy only known when he struck, Joaquin called off his hounds.

He had lost many of his bravest and most useful men, and dared not stay long in any one camp, but he perhaps believed himself rewarded for all that by having as fruit of his many enterprises considerable sums.

The horde left Calaveras County and transported the seat of operations into Mariposa County. This latter district suffered in its turn all that its neighbor had undergone.

We have not space to relate here the crimes of which it was the victim and witness, an everlasting record of bloody scenes like those already set before the reader.

The devil that seemed to direct and protect Murieta, did not seem desirous of abandoning him yet; leaden bullets seemed never to have been moulded to slay him, and we are not afraid to assert that some of his baffled pursuers may have cast balls of dollars to try the virtue of silver against him.

Though continually on the wing, these vultures were tireless in their swoops for murder and booty.

Everywhere behind them, they left a sanguinary streak to mark their passage and, at times, their most horrid crimes were executed under the very eyes of their chasers.

Cases were known when the latter had heard before them a yell for help or of agony, had pressed on their winded steeds, but only to behold victims weltering in blood, and to see the bandits, dashing off, perchance lighting cigarettes.

At the most of the time, Joaquin's freebooters were divided into small bands of five or six.

Murieta himself had rarely more than four with him, but they were the lieutenants.

Valenzuela and Three-fingered Jack were always beside him.

Guerra had the keeping of the camp. Sevalio was in the field and had no rival for daring and skill in the plundering, except Antonio.

This latter had a particular liking for the country round about Putah and Cache Creek; he was the terror of horse-owners. Every day almost he was chased, but thanks to a splendid steed which carried him, he always made out to escape.

This animal was the same which Texas Jack had been presented with by Joaquin.

Some days before leaving Stockton, the captain of the coyotes, while lying perdu in a Hunter Street house, was told by Valenzuela that Texas Jack was taken and was going to be tried for an important theft.

The chief went into the court-house and sat down quietly like any other spectator. While the judge was passing sentence on the culprit of five years' imprisonment, the latter was looking over the hall and perceived his commander. A scarcely perceptible signal was exchanged between them and the condemned man thought himself sure of safety once more.

Unluckily for him, Joaquin had only three of his men in the whole town, which was hardly a sufficient force.

He said afterwards that if he could have found a dozen men, he would have tried to take the prisoner from the police officers as they proceeded to take the steamboat for Benicia.

Five months afterwards, a queer but true story went the rounds.

There had been discovered in a huge grave dug in the ground of a ranch belonging to Texas Jack, a man and a horse. The rider had not left the saddle and his spurs were still on his boots.

All seemed to say that the man had been struck on the top of the head while in that place and position, and the murder was of recent date. Besides him were found skulls and bones, the last remains of other victims of the desperadoes.

One evening, while in a tent of a connection of his association, three miles from Mariposa, Joaquin was informed that two more of his men were off the rolls, having been hanged for horse-stealing at San Juan.

They had been pursued and caught between Gilroy's and el Pajaro, bound and taken back to the town; and committed for trial by Judge Mahon. The people, who had suffered losses in live stock, had assembled, taken the captives from the officers and strung them up according to Lynch law.

On this intelligence, the captain mounted and with his body-guard of four went towards Monterey County.

On the banks of the San Benito, not far from San Juan, he established his camping-ground, where they remained about half a week, carefully concealed during the day, but employing the night in stealing all the valuable equine cattle that they had marked at the different farms.

When they had believed that they had sufficiently avenged their gibbeted comrades, they broke camp and drove the animals to Arroyo Cantuva.

The majority of the plunderers were already there.

Almost all the parties had luckily terminated their enterprises and were awaiting fresh directions.

Thereupon began the preparations for the important acts which were to end with the brigand in California.

He had formed a connection with the richest and most influential Mexicans in the state and was sure of their co-operation in his projects.

The other people did not dream of any great plan being conceived by a man they considered a mere marauder.

Joaquin commenced by despatching to Mexico his intelligent Antonio, who was furnished with funds and the necessary instructions for the arming and equipping of volunteers and partisans, of whom he was sure beforehand, as they were waiting only for the call.

Guerra was sent to the different ranchos in the state where depots of horses had been selected; he was to get together these animals and conduct them to the head-quarters, along with all the men he might meet.

The captain for his part, had an important piece of business to transact at San Luis Obispo, for which he started the same day, with only one attendant. It was an interview with the Mexican woman whom he had encountered accidentally some months before in the Hangtown stage.

This woman, sister of Joaquin's first love, Carmela, had wedded a wealthy ranchero of Guadalajara, Mexico. On her husband's death, she had left her property and come to California, to fan the flames of vengeance in Murieta's heart and press him to carry out his shameful plans against peaceful honest citizens.

She had heard him with regret express his determination to give up roving after one more burst, but, as she found she could not dissuade him, she held council with him and returned to Mexico on the day after their meeting.

The next week, Joaquin thought of placing the girls in some sure place where nothing could happen to them. He gave Sevalio a score of his most trusty rascals as an escort to them into the province of Sonora.

The bandit leader marked out the following road for them: along the Gulf

of California, towards the San Pedro and Santa Catarina Missions, thence to gain San Francisco Borgia and the Santa Gertrudis Mission, cutting through a mountainous and thickly wooded district well known to Sevalio.

Joaquin accompanied the party some little ways to see them off, took affectionate leave of Clarina, gave a kiss all round to the other girls, to their great delight, and returned.

Reflecting that the best plan was to await the arrival of the new partisans from Lower California and Sonora, before assembling the men he had already, he countermanded the orders to Guerra and sent off his available forces into the region around him. With a party of six, he traveled Calaveras County through.

While so doing, he came to Jackson, robbing a miner named Jewel of three hundred dollars-worth of gold, a revolver and other valuables. His companions, the inseparable Valenzuela and three-fingered Jack, had their share in the understanding and never had the detestable Garcia been more in his element than during the stay in Calaveras and the surrounding counties.

Success went hand and glove with the chief in all his past three week's doings, in the northern part of Calaveras County.

Large sums of gold came into his grasping hands, so large that it was no more than prudent to shift the locality. Before the place could cry "good riddance," however, he was joined by fourteen or fifteen of his men who had been making a descent on the neighborhood of Thom's Creek, in Colusi County, where they had obtained a quantity of horses, to drive which to the main rendezvous four of them were told off.

Joaquin kept this unexpected reinforcement, went up to the headquarters of the Stanislaus and continued, in the rich valleys watered by that stream, the scenes of desolation which we have seen him renew so many times.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MORE MURDERS.—THE CAPTAIN TELLS HOW BEGAN AND HOW ENDED ANOTHER GREAT ROBBER'S CAREER.—THE STATE MOVES, AND CAPTAIN LOVE TAKES UP THE TRAIL.—GAPS IN THE ROLL.—JOAQUIN AND THREE-FINGERED JACK FIRE THEIR LAST.

After two weeks spent in the Stanislaus Valley, Joaquin made for the Rivers Mariposa and Merced. He "blazed" his path as usual by extensive depredations; after which he sent off all his followerers except the original half dozen to the Arrayo.

With them he retired to the rancho of a Mexican of San Jose, killing on the way a Frenchman who kept a public drinking garden, and concealed himself there for a while. The host was a secret member of the gang.

As they sat by the fire that night, Joaquin fulfilled a half promise which he had made in times past, and related most forcibly the adventures of the celebrated Massaroni.

He had learnt his particulars from men like Antonio who knew well the behind-the-scenes of banditti life, and hence what follows is not a mere writer's fancy but such facts as can obtained, if you are acute enough, from descendants in Italy of the banditti who acted their parts.

The police accounts tell only one half the story.

Massaroni was a young man when, up by the head waters of the Tagliamento, under the brow of the Alps, he lived to love a young girl of the country.

She robbed her parents of other valuables than herself and accompanied young Allessgndro to Veniee.

For half a year they dwelt together, and marriage was agreed upon by them. But at that time, the youth's habits and manners changed.

He was away whole nights and days and, after being profuse in harsh words, one time struck her who had given him all, her future life and happiness, her honor.

All the blood of the Italian flamed up at the insult, and she spoke to him as he had little expected to be addressed.

Suffice it, that he left her, swearing he never would see her more.

She let him go, proudly silent, but then, bowed her head on her bosom and kissed her own breasts, sadly saying:

"No more *mine*, no more *his*—*its* only and evermore! I live for that alone Allessandro, thou faithless one!"

In a few weeks, Massaroni had brushed off his regrets and twinges of conscience and become hand and glove with the *bravi* of Venice the Free, the Beautiful, the Powerful.

His extraordinary good fortune raised him speedily several grades, and he soon attained such a position that he could luxuriate during half the week, on the proceeds of robberies during the other half.

For the furtherance of his designs, he frequented pretty aristocratic, or, at least, wealthy company.

For many months he held his assumed place of a stranger, preserving incognite for reasons, silencing the easily corrupted police, and—after learning valuable secrets of rakish noblemen—having them robbed as no other could have done.

One night only, as he was about entering a casino, or gambling den, a woman stopped him and begged him to follow her to the house of, she said, "one who was dying, and loved him."

He thought it merely one of the too numerous intrigues and shoved her aside.

He forgot all about it.

Besides, the next day was the great regatta and he had entered a boat for a race, the agreement and stakes to be settled that night.

These races are great events in so watery a city as that Bride of the Sea.

Next day, the grand canal was covered with the flags of countless craft, filled with gaily attired people, while banners floated from the windows of the double rows of palatial buildings all along the aqueous highway.

The racers left Castello, skirted the Schalvonic Wharf and through the grand canal to the church of Santo Lucia, where they turned a flag-buoy and returned to the Foscario Palace, where a grand stand had been erected for the doge and chief persons.

It took some time for the chief matches to be concluded, but then began the private ones, Massaronio's turn was next to the comic one of the women, a most laughable burlesque.

The robber's antagonist was an Austrian named Pottergeist.

The gondoliers of both craft were Venitians, but the people were all on Massaroni's side from his being as decidedly a countryman as the other was a foreigner.

Off went the two hearse-like boats, keeping together well until out of sight.

On the return, the two prows were on the same line still, while they seemed to fly over rather than cut through the surface.

"Good, Pietro! again, again, Giorgio! Bravo! See, see, he's ahead! Italy forever! down with the Austrian!"

Massaroni was seated in the little cabin of his boat as his rival was in his, for the gondolas "carried weight," which made all more interesting.

"But the spectators could not see into the covered receptacle for passengers though the latter could incite their servants.

‘On, Pietro, you are like a winged bird! five hundred to you if you pass by a length!’ cried Massaroni.’

His gondolier looked aslant at his opponent and by a vigorous bending of his oars, gained notably.

“Keep it up, and they are losers!” encouraged Alessandro.

“Hey there, Giorgio!” yelled a mocking voice from the shore, “you are slow! is it a fat friar you’ve aboard who wants to go gingerly after his dinner?”

The Austrian’s man doubled his exertions and recovered his former position of neck and neck.

Cheers ran along each edge of the water, with intermingling taunts and laughs.

“On, on, Pietro, never fear!”

“Fear, signor? By Saint Mark, if I had my gunwale loaded down to the very water, I’d wager to beat Giorgio and his skiff empty.”

The two kept very equal; whenever one slackened his exertions for a space, the other shot ahead, only to be overtaken similarly when his burst died away.

“Good heart, Pietro!” cried Massaroni, appearing in the cabin entrance, “the goal is near! Think of the crowd a-looking!”

“A fico for them, signor,” answered the man, working as untiringly as if his muscles were of steel; “By Santa Maria del Rosario, you may rely on the rown! Tough work, though,” murmured he.

(These Italian gondoliers are weariless fellows,” said Joaquin; “like those boatmen on the Chagres River who pole the barges against the current—they don’t know fatigue when they are at work, and only feel tired when resting—you understand, amigos?”)

The gondolier’s speech had been heard by the Austrian on the other bark, and he said to his man, severely:

“Giorgio, you hear?”

“Bah! his tongue works better than his arms,” muttered Giorgio. “I’ll be — if I don’t sail in first—your five thousand crowns are safe to you as if they were in bank, per Bacco!”

“A thousand are yours in that case, besides a full indulgence that I will get of the papal legate for your soul.”

“Ha! no more words, See?”

Giorgio closed his lips, knit his brows in resolution, and so well expended his power that he drew a whole length ahead of the other.

“The Austrian forever!” cried many.

“Bravo, my man,” shouted Pottergeist.

“Pietro, you villain, you’re asleep,” yelled Alessandro.

“Am I?” returned the boatman, making an effort and slightly more than recovering his distance. “Pooh! I’ve been three years on the waters more than that Giorgio.”

But Massaroni’s growing fears were far from being quieted.

“That Giorgio” seemed to have but the one idea, that of overcoming his adversary by tiring him out, which in fact he promised yet to do. He shot a bit ahead, and every time that his contestant endeavored to come up to him, he put out his force so that Massaroni’s champion, exhausted considerably by his efforts, was compelled to work almost double to even keep in the other’s wake. These tactics so well aided Giorgio that he and his master became confident that if things kept on as they were, to them would be the victory. Pottergeist understood the plan no doubt, for he fell back into the little cabin, after saying:

“A thousand.”

“Get ‘em ready, master,” replied the boatman, straining at the oars.

“You’re failing, Pietro,” cried his employer, clutching the curtains with his nervous fingers. “That wretch goes like the devil!”

The end was so near that both the principals came out of the cabins and stood in full view like the boatmen.

"I'll beat the devil, be sure, master mine," growled Pietro, bending to it.

He was fully behind the Austrian, but he flattered himself that with an extraordinary essay, he could at least recover the former place of side by side, as he had managed to do before. But Giorgio, attentive to his movements, put out all his strength simultaneously with Pietro, and if anything gained something by the exertion. But what finished the lingering of Massaroni's hopes was that the opposing gondolier, three times in succession, repeated as many long sweeps of the oar.

A thunder of acclamation broke on either side and echoed in the cornices and niches of the carved windows.

"Malediction on you," roared Massaroni, "what flattery ever made you take to gondolas for a living, old helpless, Pietro? Two thousand for you, if you come in head!"

"I'll do it, if nothing breaks!"

Already incited by vanity and rivalry and now super-excited by the reward, the loser made immense efforts. He seemed to forget to breathe, and his oars were hardly to be seen feathering; they moved like the sails of a windmill. Hope returned to Massaroni, but he was only to have a short taste of joy.

The goal was at hand. All were on the alert, and too much interested to make a sound of either applause or censure.

But Gorgio had spared his skill and power for this dash, and when he saw his adversary flurried and rowing desperately, he felt sure, that he was the victor. Pietro was like the jockey who plies the persuaders and the thong on his beaten horse, Giorgio the one who comes in without having touched his steed with spur or whip. He plied his oars as regularly as if he were at an everyday work.

"Won, won!" cried Massaroni, as his gondola forged ahead.

The flagboat to be passed was not twenty yards off.

At that very moment, poor Pietro fell forward on his oars, which were jerked up out of the water, and measured his length forward. The Austrian flew on amid waving of hats and veils, a fluttering of flowers and fans, and cheers and clapping of hands. The other boat, nevertheless, followed and ran gently against the victor.

"Allow me your hand, Signor Allessandro," said Pottergeist, as he stood on the quay. "You have lost, my friend, but, per Dio, our horses ran well."

Massaroni felt an awful thirst for the speaker's blood, but that was not to be indulged in there, of course, amid that throng. He could not conceal his pallor but he felt that he had to put on dignity. So he kept down his envy and hatred, and forced a laugh as he gave the winner his hand.

"Our men have well run," said he, "there is no doubt of that. I'm afraid, though, that my old waterman is hurt."

"He's dead—see!" said half a dozen voices. "Burst a blood-vessel!"

"Oh, no odds," remarked the captain, "a couple of *paters* and some masses will make it all well, for Pietro is without kith or kin."

That was remedied, and Massaroni left the crowd.

That night, into a certain casino, sauntered he. He had some money, how obtained, no matter. He wore his most smiling mask, for his pride would have suffered if he had fancied any of the bystanders pitied him. Luckily for him, his friends were feasting, and he was well warmed up by the supper. He was the first to speak of his defeat and offer to pay the bet.

"But," said he, "do you mind trying if cards are as much against me as gondolas, Pottergeist. Shall we say, double or quits?"

"Just as you like. The double-eagle can outsoar St. Mark's lion at every thing," rejoined the Austrian gaily.

Chance was for Massaroni at the first, and he cleared off his debt. Then he staked money, and won game after game, when as the Austrian was drained pretty deeply, he gained a considerable stake.

"Time for you!" said Massaroni, forgetting himself.

"At cards, there is always time," returned the other coolly.

"Let's keep on, as I want to play on to the end. The blade, then the handle, and even the knob on the hilt after that!"

"Just what I was going to say."

It was Massaroni's turn to lose what was before him. The other appeared to regulate his play and made him pass through all the variations of the sliding scale which he had lately undergone, until a thousand crowns was his antagonist's all.

"Time for you!" murmured he.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. I was merely thinking what a fine thing it is for people to keep cool."

"What—"

But the tone of this exclamation gave Pottergeist caution, and he was too experienced a gambler to quarrel with a man who yet had money. So he smoothed his brow and met the Italian's stake.

"By the bye, will you take my word for thrice this, so as to make it four thousand?"

"Certainly. You have lost, *mio cara*," added the Austrian in triumph.

"The devil has bewitched the cards," said Allessandro, tossing off a bumper. "The devil again! the drink's bitter!" and he put down the glass so roughly that it fell off and smashed on the floor.

"Bad omen!" croaked some neighboring voice.

"Thank you, unknown signor," sneered the ruined gamester. "A pretty prophecy, after the act. Good or bad, I'll play no longer with you Pottergeist. Where's my young friend Monteafiere?"

"Busy," answered the Austrian; "he always loses at cards with you, but he gains over you in the good graces of lovely Sylvia. By the bye, how is she?"

"You saw her at the regatta as well as I—do you laugh at me?"

"Bachus forbid."

Allessandro turned and left the saloon.

"By the good Saint Pantaleone, he's very pale. Young Pisano looked so the night when he leaped off the Molo with a huge stone in his cloak to sink him," remarked some one.

"Tush. Massaroni is more like to kill than self-kill," said another.

Meanwhile the subject of these remarks had rushed frantically away toward his fashionable lodgings.

As he was wildly picking his way through the labyrinth of poverty-stricken lanes that are behind the canal-banks' grand and splendid buildings, he heard a cry of "help!"

Help! he wanted it himself and fancied that Satan was mocking him.

All was lost. Gold was gone and he had dipped already in his mistress Sylvia's purse, shameful as he considered her gift.

Midnight assassinations and robberies had ceased to pay, for the nobles had larger escorts than ever when they went visiting, since crimes had of late grown so numerous.

"Help" was the cry once more.

More deeply affected than he ought to have been to all appearance, Allessandro stopped and listened.

An infant's wail joined in the outcries. He strode through the mud up a miry alley. A feeble light gleamed before him.

He burst in a door of a hovel.

By the glimmer of a dying lamp, Allessandro beheld, on a heap of mouldy straw, a shape of a woman who, writhing in the pangs of the fever of the marshes, uttered the screams he had heard.

Near her was a quite young babe, whose similar cries grew weaker and weaker every time. The fine but unkempt hair streamed over the mother's face, but, at the crash of the stove-in door, she seemed to collect her forces sufficiently to sit half up and say in an awful voice, hollow and hoarse :

"Bread, bread ! anything to eat !"

At the voice, at the sight presented, Massaroni drew back as if the fuse of a powder mine had been burning at his feet. Indescribable horror overcame his senses, and for an instant he had much ado not to believe himself a plaything of delirium.

Was this real, or had his losses driven him mad ?

The walls streaming with damp, like the plashy floor, the wretched mockery of a bed, the dying child, the wasted wreck of a mother, this complete picture of thirst and hunger added to the worst of woes—was it possible on an earth over which rounded God's heaven ?

But this shadow of a woman, this mere reflection of one of the darlings of man, she to be here of all ! Satan must have enrobed himself in that shell to wound him with many a dreadful reflection !

The features, thinned as they were, were but to well known to him—yet could those faded, sunken cheeks be the same on which rained his tears of excessive joy and kisses of immoderate rapture in the days of their enticing bloom ? Those hands, fine as threads, mere bone, extended to him in all the anguish of despairing supplication—they had a thousand times thrilled joy into him when interlaced with his own ? And those eyes, bright with fever and approaching madness—could they ever have been the twin wells from which had poured the bliss which he had bathed in, ravished, and sworn to be inexhaustible ?

"Isalia ! is it you ?" gasped he, trembling to receive the answer.

"Bread, bread," was all the poor creature could say, as she fell back on the straw.

"Speak, speak again !" cried the man, moving nearer to the rotting couch. "Is it you, Isalia ! Isalia, I say ! *is it you ?*

"Ah—h ! Allessandro ! All's not lost if it's you—I die, no bread—for four day's starving—and the baby cannot—"

"Good God—can it be ! Halloa ! ho there ! help help ! bread, bread !"

But louder though his voice was than hers, no better fortune was his. Not a sound replied.

"No one comes," whispered she, "go yourself for—a drop of water—a crumb of bread ! Don't let me die now, Pandro, with our child—"

"Our child !—Wait, wait ! Hope, hope, I will make you happy."

So saying, he kissed avidly her wasted hands ; he flung himself on his knees on the cold floor, kissed her again and again, then the infant's forehead until, suddenly called to their state, he sprang up and rushed away.

The air of the street so contrasted with that of the valley and the hovel that it made him shudder and reel. He hesitated.

At that hour, every house was closed and the streets and canals untenanted except by miscreants and the police, which latter he feared more than the other from being on only too intimate a footing with them. He made for his residence, running at the top of his speed. Long and loudly did he knock at the door, swearing at the sluggish servants and trying to break in. But the whole household was away.

He remembered.

"Confusion ! I said I would be at the ball and gave them leave to be out all night like myself. My valet is to await me at Sylvia's. To Sylvia's then !"

Off again he set like a madman. Lights burned at the courtesan's, and he

almost instantly was let in. He very nearly upset the porter. Before flying up the staircase, he turned and, seeing behind him the shuddering servant, cried imperiously :

“Giobbe! bread, wine, instantly.”

Poor Giobbe, as terrified as his patient biblical namesake was at the advent of the whirl wind, ran away to obey his orders and tell the kitchen-girl of his mistress's lover's state, relating circumstantially how he must have beheld the ghost of headless Faliero, or the armless gondolier of the Canal della Giudecca, or the twin ballet-girls of the Apollo Theatre who had been flying off the Campo di Marte Bridge by drunken scions of noble houses.

In the mean time, Massaroni had ascended the steps and pounded at Sylvia's room.

Delay.

At last, the waiting-maid opened and gave a shriek of alarm at sight of his appalling face. She thought her last hour had come when those flaming eyes poured a scorching fire on her, but he was impelled by too great emotion to quarrel with the servant for her slowness. Like a thunderbolt he burst through the door of Sylvia's bedroom.

Now he recoiled.

Instead of finding the lovely courtesan abed and asleep, she was dressed and standing pale and agitated, leaning on the arm of a sofa. But Allessandro was not in a mood to calmly analyse his surprise.

“Do you love me, Sylvia?” he asked.

“What do you mean?” stammered she, her limbs failing her; she almost shrieked! “don't look at me so!”

“Loving me or not, I must save her! I have spent heaven knows how much on you! give me some money!”

The astounded Aspacia was far from understanding, but with an earnestness given to her by the fear of irritating Allesandro she mechanically unlocked her sacket and poured out the coin into her chief lover's hands; she was going to add her jewelry when, to her still greater surprise, Massaroni rushed out as abruptly as he had come, pocketing the money.

In a few instants, the watering-maid came in to say :

“Whatever will become of us! the signor has gone away with a loaf of bread under each arm, and Pietro with a basket of wine.”

“What can this mean?” murmured Sylvia, sinking on the sofa. “I am ready to perish with fear.”

“Keep up a good heart, lovely one,” said a man's voice, that of Montefiere, “I'll run to the casino and learn all. If he has found all out, believe me, you will not suffer from his anger.”

“What do you mean? Why, youth, he can undoubtedly defeat you at sword, stiletto or pistolet,” said the courtesan, seemingly to awaken to the superiority of the lover she deceived over her present dialogist.

Montefiere dismissed the maid.

“I fight him, not as duellist, but as an unconquerable!” returned he proudly, then.

“Who are you!” demanded Sylvia, letting a scrutinizing look dwell upon his face. “You're not rich, or you would not levy on me, whose love, too, you have forced from me. Who, who ??”

“Either tremble or be fearless, my cherished one, no matter,” laughed the young man; “it is true, anyway, that I bear a talisman that opens all doors, and puts all at my command. I am Montal, the second inquisitor, next to Messer Grand himself!”

“'Sh!” gasped the woman with blanched cheeks.

“But only a lover to you, dear charmer.”

She smiled and turned away playfully, but, if the executor of the orders of

the terrible Ten had more attentively watched her, he would have seen her dash a tear from her eyes, and, could he have read her thoughts—but few men ever did that to woman—he would have found one thus:

“I love Allessandro more than ever now that I find I was right to feel disgust at this wretch forcing himself on me!”

“Is it true?” asked she with cunning.

“True! Behold!” and he triumphantly flaunted a yellow card dotted in one corner with a black seal, whose melted wax had fastened a little ribbon of sable and a gold stripe to it.

She shuddered. That piece of pasteboard was as powerful as many a noble's purse or sword.

“I must escape from the city,” she thought. “It is worse than death to be in his arms.”

Nevertheless, she had to resign herself to them and assume her most winning air. But her unpleasant task was not long imposed upon her, and she thanked whatever divinity her courtesan's heart might worship when a prolonged knocking at the front door of her mansion gave her relief.

Monteafiere jumped up and did not look to be the fearless man he should have been, and he grasped his sword hilt with a weak hand. He had always ordered the domestics to delay anybody's entrance so as to give him time to hide or to escape. It was time to do the latter. He hastened to press a kiss upon the yielding yet plump lips of the Lais. She, while mechanically suffering the salute, used one of her hands in what appeared to be a caress but was that “wire dip” known then as now to pickpockets.

Monteafiere rushed from the room and upstairs to get away over the rooftops, while a sound of steps coming up the stairs made him speed quicker and the mistress smile in anticipation.

“Allesandro comes! Thank heaven. With this, we will give Venice goodbye,” she said as she looked at an object in her hand.

The yellow card.

The steps approached and the waiting-maid entered.

“Signora, signora, Signor Allesandro took Pietro into the alley of Santa Maria dell' Orto, where they found a woman and a child dead—just dead of hunger—skin and bones, my lady! Then the signor flung down the bread and was going to fling away the money he had in his pockets when he remembered himself, kissed the poor woman and child, wept, sobbed himself quiet and then rushed off, saying he was going to pay his debts, first to man, then to Nature!”

“Kill himself!”

“I'm afraid so,” rejoined the servant.

“My course is clear. Send me Alvarez the Spaniard and Pietro, quick.”

As the servant said, so had Massaroni acted on finding himself too late on the return to Isalia. When convinced they were beyond earthly reach, he gave way to heart-breaking rage till calm by exhaustion.

Subdued in appearance till not a soul suspected his slumbering, volcanic feeling, he entered the ~~casino~~ which had been the first step of his abandonment of the dead one. On entering, he refused to drink with an acquaintance, and looked around for some one. While searching, the object of his scrutiny came up to him and suddenly said:

“Beg pardon—wanted to see you—I've a debt to pay—can you—?”

“Pay mine, Pottergeist? What does such a question mean?”

“Just what I say. If you *can* pay me, do so.”

The ebbed blood flowed into his visage from his heart, but Massaroni only approached the nearest table and flung upon it the contents of his pockets.

“Count,” said he to the Austrian.

“Three crowns short,” answered the latter.

Allessandro pulled a ring off his finger.

"You was with me under the Palazza Mocenigo when I bought it——"
"I'm satisfied."

At this moment, one of the coins slipped off to the ground.

"You handle money less skilfully than cards," said Allesandro with railing.

"Do you mean I cheat at play?" furiously demanded the German.

"I mean what I say," retorted the Italian.

The Austrian's eyes launched fire, while the other's replied no less brilliantly. A circle began to form.

"If you're not as white of heart as saucy of tongue," said Pottergeist. "a dueth alone can be what you're driving at."

Before the speaker had finished, Allesandro did that act which anybody, and an Italian above all, considers the height of insult. He spat in the hollow of his hand and slapped the German's cheek. That cheek, and the whole face of course, grew white as a virgin sheet, and he plunged his hand into his bosom for a weapon, no doubt, but a murmur and the sight of so many round about, checked that design.

"Actions speak louder than words," remarked Massaroni. "I do want a duel to the death with you, cheat!"

"Single combat is prohibited strictly," said somebody.

"Silence!" shouted twenty voices, "gentlemen do not run after the police!"

"Come!" cried Massaroni, "come into the fencing hall—these gentlemen will be seconds and witnesses."

A rush was made into the designated room, for these casinos have reading-rooms, libraries, and other apartments attached to the drinking-saloon portion. The door was closed. A couple of foils had the buttons snapped off, leaving an ugly jagged point on each.

"Before fighting, of course the victor will be let go undisturbed," said Pottergeist.

"Of course," answered the Italian, "Venitians are too much men of honor not to make that a matter understood. But you shall not profit by the leave."

"We'll see—thunder and lightning!"

The long steel threads clashed in equal rage but with different result. At the first engagement, Massaroni's shirt-sleeve was torn off his shoulder, but his weapon ran deeply into the breast of the German who dropped mortally wounded.

"Away!" shouted all.

Allessandro darted out of the hall as if a fresh crime was not burdening his shoulders.

At the door, he came in contact with a man running towards the casino. It was Monteafire. With a wrestling trick, learnt in the country in his youth, Allessandro "gave" the runner "the foot," and down he sprawled, his head cracking against the doorpost in so severe a way that he was certain not to revive for some moments. The victor in this surprise, very quickly and tranquilly removed the senseless man's sword and belt and set off again, girding on the baldric as he ran.

While this was occurring, Sylvia had secured her jewels on her person and at length, calling her maid she gave her a splendid pair of bracelets.

"Take one of the serving men and haste to the Jew of whom the Count Cellini bought these. Make him give you half of the value in cash. Bring it to San Marco Church, at once."

While this mission was in progress, Sylvia put on a couple of cloaks and slipped out of the house privately. The night was growing darker, and the courtesan was almost delighted to be under the gleam of the pendant lamps of the great church. She surveyed the interior carelessly when all of a sudden her eyes rested on a form kneeling under a painting of a minor saint: Saint Alexander.

She softly approached.

All was so hushed in the lonely edifice that she heard her heart leap. It was Massaroni, praying to his patron saint.

Should he try to retrieve his career of evil for the sake of the dead Isalia, or continue it for the sake of his guilty self?

While he wavered, a pair of soft arms embraced him, and lips touched his cheek, Sylvia knelt beside him!

"I love you. I must leave the city; will you come and be my joy; or not, and make me a miserable outlaw?"

"I will go with you! I have killed Pottergeist the German, and Montefiere perhaps—you did not know it?"

"My brave and gallant Allessandro—an Alexander like of old, I love you all the more! Come, come."

"I was going to leave the city——" he began.

"And I."

"And the world!" added he hoarsely.

"No, no, and break my heart? Loved one, dear, my life of lives! no, no!" And her lips found the way to his this time.

When the maid who had been despatched on the errand came to the church she found Massaroni, gloomy but resolved, beside her mistress.

"Have you the money?" cried the latter.

"Yes, but I could not be any sooner."

"Very well. Go home. All there of mine is yours. Now, *my* Allessandro, follow me to the shore."

The rising wind and the obscurity foreboded a night such as the fugitives wished, for the sbirri were sufficiently dangerous without the moon to guide them in the chase. Hasty steps suddenly became audible behind them, after they had been walking swiftly for a few seconds; they were by one of the three hundred bridges of the Adriatic's Bride. They ran over it and hid themselves under the hanging doorway of a second-hand clothes-man's shop.

Several men came along and crossed the canal at a run.

"Keep on to the left, while I take the right and see if any of the boats shelter them," shouted a voice which the listeners recognized as Montefiere's.

They obeyed.

"The safest course is to follow the wretch," said Massaroni. "He is alone and far from dangerous."

On he marched then, followed by his mistress. Soon they overtook Montefiere, who had stopped to awaken several gondoliers and ask them questions to which he got no satisfactory answers, of course. He pursued his way swearing.

Massaroni let him go on for a while, till he believed him to be far enough off, when he strode directly up to a gondolier, tapped him on the shoulder and whispered:

"Fifty ducats for a trip to Trieste."

"Who are you—are you the man they are after?" queried the boatman. "I shouldn't take you for a thousand."

"My man," interposed Sylvia, "you run no danger. See!"

She displayed the yellow card, which put an end to his obstinacy.

"I'm ready," said he to the astounded Massaroni.

The two entered the boat, but, after they had snugly ensconced themselves, a man presented himself just as the gondolier was unloosening the painter from its ring. It was Montefiere.

"You're in danger, friend," said he. "I saw two shadows beside yourself here. I forbid you to shove off in the name of —"

He had leaped on the boat, when a beautiful white arm—an arm which with its mate had often been around him in compulsory embrace—arose over his

head, armed with the end of a broken oar and down he went in the doorway of the cabin. Massaroni's hand could hardly have delivered a more powerful blow than this of Sylvia's.

"Push off!" said Allessandro.

Stimulated by fear as well as by the ample pay, the boatman was soon cleaving the boisterous water.

"We are served!" said Sylvia, enfolding her lover in her arms.

"But this man? what will we do with him? You can hardly have killed him."

"I hope so," said she earnestly. "Any how he must never look upon Venice or the world anywhere again!"

The presence of Montafeire was to the courtesan a sleeping horror, for one word from him would have changed her companion's love into scorn and even if she revealed the true position of the senseless wretch, she could not hope to reinstate herself. With a strength which her alarm gave her, she half raised the lifeless form out of the hollow of the boat and tried to cast it overboard.

"Stop!" cried Allessandro.

But woman's hate is swift; the body was already vanishing in the crested waves.

"Signor," said the gondolier, "*red galley* is cruising to-night. I saw her awful sides bloodily shining in the sunset as she went down the port. What shall I answer if we're hailed?"

"There!" replied Sylvia, panting yet with her emotion, "show them that card. Trieste, Trieste, you must haste to it."

Tossing the purloined pasteboard to the man, she drew her companion into the little cabin and pressed him with frenzy to her bosom.

"We are safe! We are happy!" said she.

Massaroni, his brain too much in a whirl for him to think in the least calmly, gave himself up to repose.

Meanwhile, the storm, which had hung over the Adriatic for the last two hours, burst in all its violence, and the billows, heaved as high as if they were those of the broader Mediterranean. The fragile gondola, ill adapted for rough weather, hardly answered to the strokes of the oarsman. He called Massaroni to his aid and, with an air gloomy though respectful, asked him, to try his hand at propulsion until he could take a rest.

"You tempted me with your gold," said he, "and heaven punishes me for yielding to it. San Marco! do you hear: a cannon shot. If the ships big as houses are in danger, what chance has my poor boat? Row, signor, for I will soon need all my strength—to swim, perhaps."

Allessandro did his best at the oars, but his lack of skill rendered his good will useless.

"We'll be broadside to it if you go on so," said the gondolier impatiently.

"Take the oars yourself, sirrah," interposed Sylvia, who was the most courageous of all. "I double the promised sum if you bring me into Trieste."

"That's something like! But if we go down—"

"We cannot help it. But we will arrive, I say."

The man retook the oars, and Allessandro returned to sit beside his companion who, affecting weakness now, let herself recline on his breast. The waves rose and rose, and the thunder, suddenly unloosed, rolled with few interruptions. The flashes kept the eyes in a state of dazzlement.

Suddenly the oars ceased to buffet the rollers, and the man hid his face in horny palms. A scream even issued from Sylvia's mouth and she turned aside in horror.

"Help, help!" faintly said a voice. "In the name of the Holy, give me help!"

An enormous billow swept onward and broke near the bank. A zizzag of

the electric fluid ran along the crest down into the trough. Allessandro, bending his sight towards where had come the voice, was seized like his companions with deep affright, for there seemed to stand amid the spray that very Montefiere who was deemed dead.

In truth, only stunned by Sylvia's blow, and brought to consciousness while the plaything of the waters, he had been taken off to sea by a recoiling current and caught by the reflux, was apparently driving back the gondola of his slayers. The loss of blood which he had experienced had made him too weak to swim and he was still living only by a miracle. On beholding the boat, a little hope had been kindled within him and, not recognizing its occupants, he had gasped between two mouthfuls of brine, his imploring cry.

But his hour had come!

The second wave broke over him and sent him under, and the third dashed him against the gondola, while its snowy front reddened with his blood, and nothing more was seen of him.

"A spirit!" said the gondolier, rowing again. "Heaven have mercy on us!"

"It will not have mercy on me," groaned Massaroni in despair. "How many horrors the last few hours have deluged me with. Oh, Sylvia! were it not for you, I would plunge into the deep to join my happier victims."

The courtesan, spray-bedewed, exhausted, terrified, was too much affected to answer. She could not fill her lover with energy which she was far from having herself. Silence reigned over the bark, except the soughing of the wind and the prayers of the boatman.

Finally, the tempest sensibly abated, and the first gleams of the dawn appeared, while the gondola became more manageable. The fugitives breathed again, and indulged in mutual caresses. The boatman especially hailed the daybreak.

"Here we are all right, I hope! Holy Virgin! but my little boat has done her duty—not a one of my mates' could have breasted such hillocks of foam. But, goodness of heaven! how are we bearing! Thunder! the wind shifted in the dusk, and here we are turned round so that San Marco's dome is in sight. And—oh, signor, signor, back into the cabin! here comes the red galley—hide yourselves!"

Indeed, from one side, bore down upon the gondola a six-oared galley of an appalling character.

Blood-red were its sides; its prow and stern and its large cabin, with ample hangings, being scarlet as well, the only relief being embroidery in shiny black silk. A lantern was stuck in the ornamented beak, which bore a gilt lion, and its glass sides, broken by slaps of waves, however, were stained red. The oarsmen were attired in sable imitation velvet, as were four sbirri holding muskets. As the barge approached, a black-robed man, wearing a silk mask and cap with one long plume, appeared in the cabin entrance.

It had evidently been out all night, and was returning to Venice.

"In the name of Messer Grand, grand high servitor of the Inquisitors of the State and prime executioner of the ever-just orders of the honored council of Ten," chanted another black robe appearing behind the first, evidently a secretary, "cease motion, gondolier!"

He was obeyed.

"You are out early for customers; have you any within?" went on the clerk.

"I couldn't help it, a will stronger than mine drove me out of port," answered the gondolier.

"Oh, the tempest," said the clerk who seemed in good humor.

"No, a power higher even than that," said the boatman, affecting a great belief in his blasphemy, as he displayed the yellow card and jerked his thumb significantly towards his cabin, which had been the object of the Messer's scrutiny.

"Ah!" said the latter, speaking instead of his clerk this time, "go on, **sorry** to have detained you. Bound to Trieste?"

The gondolier looked grave and important.

"Very well. Wherever you land, spread the news that the murderers of Duke Doscarli of Barberigo are caught and in our power," said the Messer proudly and loudly.

Two men, bound hand and foot, were indeed inside the cabin of the barge, which now moved off rapidly under the stout arms of the six men. The little gondola resumed its course until the galley was a mere crimson dot on the grey waters.

Day was come.

The gondolier shipped his oars, entered the cabin, opened a locker and took out a bottle, whose large mouth was capped with a pewter cup which was also the stopper. He offered his patron a drink, which did Massaroni good, and took two or three times the same dose with much gusto. He took to the oars again, fresh as a rose, he said:

"And up comes the sun—huzza! warm me, old boy of brightness! for I never hoped to see you again, yellow-face!" said he.

The god of gladness had indeed pierced the clouds and poured his startling beams over the scarcely soothed scene. The Adriatic was level enough to reflect in the distance the sails of moored ships, and of fishing boats leaving port. The sky and land were assuming that loveliness which is elsewhere known in only Turkey, India, Oceanica and parts of America.

Massaroni was affected by the beauty, and by the beauty of the woman by his side. Her words so coincided with his thoughts that, on landing at Trieste, Allessandro Massaroni was ready to be whatever that enchantress desired. His all was complete.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BRIGAND'S STORY CONTINUED.—STEEL TO THE LOVER, LEAD TO THE GIRL, FIRE TO THE ROOF!—THE DEFEAT.—MASSARONI'S AVENGER.

YEARS passed, (continued Joaquin) and Allessandro the brigand had upreared a barrier between him and society of every species of crime, cemented with blood. At times, he entered the circles in which he felt him so stained and unworthy, but the end always was, a new exploit and a deeper dive into the abyss of guilt. The mountains were his retreat. He was head of a band of adventurers, outlaws like himself.

It was the middle of the afternoon, but the bright sun but dimly flittered through the brushwood and a winding entrance into a large cavern, half natural, half artificial.

Forty or fifty men with nearly as many females were drinking and revelling by the light of some fine wax tapers which had been intended for the churches, but had been captured by the banditti.

At the head of the immense but rough table, strangely covered with rich damask, more plunder, and plate, were a young man and a woman not young, but so exceedingly bewitching and superb yet that no one could fail to recognize Sylvia the courtesan of Beautiful Venice.

"He's gone again; oh, how can Allessandro so leave me?" sighed she.

"All the better! may it be for the halter," said her young gallant, embracing her.

"No, no," cried another of the band, "if he is ever to be taken, let us give

him up, along with Carlotti, and receive pardon with the reward. But you're so eager to succeed to Massaroni; yes, you are, Giulio, that you forget even your own interest."

Giulio, as he was called, laughed, and, encircling Sylvia's waist, kissed her unceremoniously.

"You see, as regards fair Sylvia, I have already entered into the succession. The command of the troop comes next. With her, I will have the secret of Allessandro's treasure. She alone, with Carlotti, knows where it is buried.

The courtesan, who was thus playing false, was immersed in reverie, yielding herself to Giulio's words. At these last words she started:

"The treasure!" echoed she; "yes, I do know where it is, and it was by my advice that Allessandro concealed it past all your searches. So long as that is secret, he can trust himself among you; it is a curb to your thoughts of treachery, for you have no cause to injure him, if I have."

Excited by drink, for she drank like the thirstiest man among them, she stood up and waved her arms over the table, like a priestess of antiquity.

"Oh, I would give all you, my love, that treasure, to have Allessandro all mine again. I loved him with a true love! Yes, look at me in surprise! what care I? When I see Allessandro moody, when I hear him curse and swear in reply to my passionate words, when, exhausted by my entreaties, I wait for one kiss or one word to prove he will be the Massaroni of old still again, when I am crouched at his feet like a slave—when he then repulses me—Oh, I'd give the world to make things otherwise! no wonder I threw myself into your arms, Giulio; wounded pride, scorned love, make me yours. I laugh, sing, and chatter, but my tortures won't sleep—will they ever?"

She tossed off a great cup of a hot preparation of wine, spices, and limes.

"But if my Allessandro—handsome, brave Allessandro—becomes once more the man who so well answered to my love, I will forget all. But he rejects me, and if ever he is mine, 'tis only when liquor has mastered him. Malediction! perhaps he loves elsewhere! no doubt he does! Who, who? I'll—I'll make her heart bleed! Jealous, jealous—that's the word for my life. Drink drink, let me drown my woes, let me forget how I sowed, how I reap!"

Another goblet she emptied, and fell into Giulio's arms. The robbers laughed at her ravings.

"She's half drunk, Giulio," whispered some one. "Give her more, and talk the secret out of her."

"You lie, knave, I have all my reason," said Sylvia, fiercely. "Sing, Giulio, sing! Shout, roar, you men!"

The orgie arose more frantically than ever, and all were as joyful as if they did not hatch treason against the chief.

Where was he? Wending his way unsuspiciously towards the little village of Velma, on the banks of the Isonzo River.

The mayor of this hamlet has finished his late dinner of grapes and coarse bread, and was enjoying the siesta, so welcome to a man of fifty like him.

As he was aroused by ringing of the church bell, he sat up, stamped his foot angrily and cried:

"Rosalia! Rosalia! curses on your love of dress. She'll make me lose my mayoralty. Rosalia! it's time."

"So I thought, and I'm ready," said a very pretty girl, appearing in the porch suddenly. "Am I well enough looking?"

"Five hundred times better bait than the shark deserves! you look like a bride."

"Much you know of dress to say that, father. I hope to be much gayer when I wed the Lieutenant Salvator Rocco."

"You've too much tongue! if you keep on chattering, the vulture may be on the wing; then good-bye to my mayoralty and Salvator's captaincy in prospect. Go, go, my dear Rose, lose no time. Heaven guard you. Be prudent. Settle things as we have agreed. Oh, women, women," mused he as his daughter fluttered up the road, "what vines to train properly. She is as good as the best, and yet she's not worth the rope that hangs her."

While this parental and philosophical opinion was being expressed, the subject of it was threading the defiles of the mountains, where the shadows began to thicken.

She did not perceive that a man was following her at a great distance.

He wore the green and yellow uniform of the royal border guard, and was the Lieutenant already mentioned.

He carried his sword ready drawn in his hand.

"Confound it!" ejaculated he at last "now, which way did she go? I ought to have kept closer to her."

He had lost his pilot, but he did not give up the search.

At length after an hour's rambling, he crept up to a thicket, where a man's voice alternated with Rosalia's softer one.

Could the officer have seen as well as he heard, he would have bounded instantly to the spot. Allessandro the brigand was replacing the meaner earrings of the girl with another pair, which a princess might have envied. Were the diamonds as pure as they seemed? Not likely, for they had come by the challenge of "Stand and deliver!"

Rosalia could suspect this, but she made no resistance, either from indifference to their origin or from yielding to a delight for jewelry which many females old and young have a weakness for.

"How handsome!" breathed she.

"Never mind them, Rose of love," murmured the mountain chief, "I implore you to be my friend—friend, friend! for can I ask the greater title? Oh, I have so often been visited by your image, so often have tried to kiss you in dreams! But waking or sleeping, I have always respected you as a sister. I never had a sister, Rose! You are weeping, child—"

She was weeping, more over herself than for Allessandro, but she could not lay bare the source of her burning tears.

"Have you indeed pity even for me, Massaroni the brigand?"

"Massaroni!" echoed Lieutenant Salvator, whose sword clanked in his nervous grasp.

A silence ensued. The robber was awaiting the response which the young girl could not utter. Her hand was in his own; he drew her to him, their hearts beat *against* one another—not as one! Was it an augury? thought the bandit.

"What must I say?" she murmured, her tear-bathed face close to his burning one.

The contact of her pure breath on his lips that had been often scorched by the fiery Sylvia, fanned the flame within him. He kissed her fervently. Suddenly she tore herself from his enclasping arms, and moaned:

"I am a wretch! Do you know why I am here?"

Truth and the spur of conscience were the stronger, and doubtlessly she would have told the robber what an infamous part she had been induced to perform, but the listener had judged it high time to interfere, and made his unexpected appearance, sword in hand.

"To-morrow, she was to sell you to us," cried Salvator, falling upon Massaroni. "I gain a day, brigand, in taking you now!"

The lieutenant had understood in an instant the whole plot of his would-be father-in-law.

But the officer's impetuosity was useless to him; quicker than he, Allessandro

had leaped up, put aside the thrust with one arm, and plunged his dagger into his breast. The lieutenant fell forward on his face, and drove the blade up to the very hilt by striking the ground. Not a word, groan or sound did he make.

Rosalia had fallen on her knees before the outlaw, whose tall form towered over the dead man and her, who was half expiring.

"Did that man speak true?" inquired Allessandro in a hoarse tone, as he drew a pistol.

"Yes, but listen—I would not have betrayed you, for I love——"

An ironical laugh and the report of the fire-arm was all the answer to this exclamation coming from the depths of the poor girl's heart. A second corpse poured out its warm blood on the soil which had drank up the man's.

"The whole world is against me!" yelled the brigand, hurling his weapon far from him, and rushing into the wood. "Purity and innocence are leagued against me. I will war now to the death!"

About an hour after dark, some one knocked at the door of the mayor's cottage. Thinking it was his belated daughter returned at last, he hurried down to open it.

"Well, have your winning ways——"

"They brought her death—there it is!" shouted Allessandro, felling him to the ground.

With a rage that awoke all his immense energy, he burst into the house, flung an old servant whom he met from top to bottom of the stairs, kicked the fire round the room and with one brand kindled the beds. He sallied out with a last kick at the mayor's body that sent it away out into the garden, and tossed his torch into the barn as he ran past. The blaze sent its rays even to the mountain haunt.

"Friends," thundered the brigand, as he appeared before the carousers, "I have heard your mutterings. Come out and see if Massaroni the brigand has a dead hand!"

A few of the drunkards staggered out to glance at the conflagration, which was spreading in the hamlet, and then dropped into the cave again.

"The g—g—good old Captain again!" stammered one. "Hurray for the old times c—come again!"

"Sylvia, here!" roared the brigand chief crazily. "Some drink, and your glorious self!"

Sylvia crawled tremblingly up to her master's feet and executed slavishly whatever he drunkenly demanded.

* * * * *

When the news of these three murders spread throughout the district, great indignation and wrath was excited. People became ashamed of their fears of the band, and their courage was fed by the reinforcements of troops that were sent into the region.

The banditti spies informed him of all the preparations which had become so formidable that flight alone offered itself. The cave was sure to be found out eventually.

Massaroni made the valuables be packed and had all his force in readiness to move that night. Darkness was necessary for the march unseen of so many men.

"Giulio," ordered the chief, "send out the men to scout and study the ground for our move to-night."

Three of the bandits started off, after receiving private instructions from the traitor. They boldly descended from the heights, and as boldly followed the highway. Before long they came upon a sentinel who cried out "to arms!" and leveled his musket at them.

A corporal and his squad surrounded the trio and marched them along with

them into the presence of a number of soldier's and country police. The bandits began to repent of their imprudence.

"Who are you?"

"Outlaws."

"Aha!" said the speaker, the new mayor of Velma, "so you belong to those wretches, whom we're going to settle?"

"We did belong to them of late. We have come to propose a treaty, by which we will give you up our leader Massaroni, who is the really guilty man."

"A treaty!" said the colonel commanding. "Well you are a saucy set. We will have your leader and all his crew without striking hands with you, my fine fellows. The mountain is covered with troops."

"You'll only lose the lives of many a brave man, sir. Give me and my friends here and the others we left behind, our lives, and you shall have our captain bound like a sheep, in half an hour."

"You're a shame-faced knave," said the officer.

"Colonel Lucca," replied the bandit, "two years ago you did not call your comrade Cesario Marani that."

The blood flushed up in the officer's face.

"On my soul! you are Cesario—the lieutenant in my Albanian regiment two years ago! you in such company?"

"Who could help it, Colonel, a lieutenant's pay is petty. Stretch a point for an old friend and fellow soldier, and let me go sardine-catching the rest of my life."

At the word "friend" used by a bandit to an officer so proud as he, the Colonel's confusion changed into wrath.

"My friend the Mayor," said he, turning to that official, "I flatter myself that my character is above this rogue's aspersions. I did know him, true enough, but he had not so deeply disgraced himself. He wants me to stretch a point for him for the sake of Auld Lang Syne, does he! Mr. Mayor, have the kindness to make him stretch one out of the bundle of rope we have along with us."

"We are under flag of truce," said Cesario stoutly. "We are sacred according to the laws of war."

"We'll sacrifice you, my gallant wolves, and so we will your mates," said the Colonel.

"If you delay us, Massaroni will escape!"

"But you'll not escape," said the mayor. "Finish with these rascals," added he to a couple of ugly devils who looked like the hangmen they were. "Their own confession convicts them. Any tree will be good enough gibbet."

The three robbers stared at one another. They had not foreseen any such disagreeable sequel to their faithlessness, and could hardly realize their position.

"You'll regret what you're doing, my sirs," said Cesario, essaying to talk himself out of the scrape. "The true and only guilty one of all the crimes set down to us, is our captain. We poor fellows never shed blood."

"Well, we'll not shed yours, be satisfied," interrupted the mayor impatiently.

On his sign, the two Jack Ketches stepped up to the bandits to pinion them, but their approach restored the wretches their energy. They were disarmed, but they knocked aside the soldiers and rushed for cover of the bushes.

"Fire!" shouted the colonel.

A rattle of musketry resounded, and two of the fugitives were seen dimly through the smoke to fall, riddled with lead, among the brush. Cesario hesitated a moment, half fell, but, almost instantly, resumed his flight up the acclivity and vanished from the clumsier pursuers.

"You, fellows, must get your hand in," remarked the mayor facetiously. "String up those two."

In a trice, the bleeding bodies swung in the air from the nearest tree.

"That volley will have given the banditti the alarm, colonel," observed the mayor.

"No matter. My orders are out for the advance from all sides. The wretches are surrounded."

The outlaws had heard the discharge, but they waited still. Several of them with cords ready, had kept near Massaroni, to bind him at the signal from Giulio.

All of a sudden, quickly falling footsteps were heard and Cesario appeared, his hand deeply buried in his side, his lips red with an internal bleeding, his eyes a-glow, in every lineament and every limb—except that no triumph was on his brow—a model of the Spartan youth who ran himself to death to bring the news of the battle to the Senate.

"They give no quarter—fight, fight, and avenge us, comrades!" gasped he with bloody foam between every word. "They come! may this wipe out my—my treach—er—y!"

He fell back into his friend's arms, a corpse.

"Thank heaven!" murmured Sylvia, who ran to Massaroni and embraced him with a joy he could not understand. "Your only hope, my men, is in your protector and chief!"

"Massaroni forever!" was the universal cry.

Giulio had no longer a party.

"Ready all!" said Allessandro, "ready all for ploughing our way through the foe?"

"All! all!"

Giulio instantly set out with the women and baggage, and a sufficient escort, with orders to use the secret ways he so well knew. Scouts went out at the same time, but very soon returned. From every quarter, they said, the enemy was advancing.

"Captain," reported the last, "I saw from the mountain's brow, two men hanged. They must be our poor friends."

"No doubt."

Bancroft Library

"The southern defiles are full of countrymen," said this same man, "they are not well armed and we can beat them."

"Very well. We will do it. But if we must fly," added Massaroni, "still will we avenge our comrades. Follow me."

Giulio was gone, and with him his baleful influence. The outlaw had re-assumed his former tone of command which admitted of no reply. The state of things, too, permitted no grumbling or wavering. They followed their captain, who penetrated a little-used branch of the subterraneous.

Three kegs of powder had been properly arranged, with a match, which the last of the file was to ignite. The banditti streamed along hurriedly, laden with spoil and weapons, in haste to quit the underground retreat which had so long been their asylum and was soon to be fatal to their hunters.

They breathed the fresh air at length, having come out on a distant hill-side of which they had never suspected the connection with their place of refuge. The rear guard had fired a few shots in the neighborhood of the cavern.

"That will not fail to attract them," said Massaroni. "May a thousand of our enemies meet death for their blood-thirstiness."

Almost as he spoke, and while all watched, a sound as of distant thunder rumbled, and the ground shook. A tall pyramid of flame, smoke and dust, intermingled with huge masses of rock and fragments of trees, rose and stood on its point where the cavern had been. All fell thereupon, and the earth quaked once more, till a more profound silence reigned all around.

A very distant detonation broke it first of all.

"Giulio has cut his way through," exclaimed the brigand chief, after listening. "Good! Let us try our luck against the clods in the southern passes."

They tried their chance against the peasantry who, poorly armed as they were, nevertheless, made such a resistance that no more than fifteen of the robbers contrived to break through the lines. The rest, dead or crippled, fell into the countrymen's hands. Massaroni bleeding at seven wounds from club, pitchfork and scythe-pole, and with a broken arm, made the victorious party forget how many had perished in the blown-up cave.

Massaroni was hanged, though Giovanni Carlotti, his faithful lieutenant (who had unfortunately not been at his side during his captain's last adventures) made a gallant attempt to escape him.

For three nights, soldiers watched the gibbet to prevent a rumcred trial to obtain the body. On the fourth, it was removed by whom none knew.

* * * * *

Months passed.

A man was swiftly dragging a woman along up the side of a mountain. The man was Giulio the traitor, she Sylvia. Not a word left the lips of either, as they ran upwards.

Suddenly Sylvia stopped, wrenched free her arm, and sat herself down on a large table of stone that jutted over a tremendously deep precipice. In the valley below, the first object that attracted the eyes of anybody was a little mound on the side of the hollow, which earned its prominence from being covered with a coarsely hewn but beautiful slab of marble, white as white could be. On it were riveted the eyes of the seated woman.

"Why, Sylvia, what ails you?" growled Giulio, seeing that she seemed determined not to move. "Forget your fatigue till we give them the slip."

She, with an effort, removed her gaze from that snowy spot on the dark green and brown, and regarded the speaker fixedly. She shook her head, and responded :

"I wish to avoid my thoughts, not our comrades who follow us."

"Oh, none of your nonsense, Sylvia. Massaroni's dead, and you ought to be satisfied now."

"Dead! so he is, for that (and she pointed) is the grave of the leader you sought to sell."

"That!" echoed he, following the direction of her wasted arm, extending downward.

"Under that slab, no whiter, no purer than was his soul when I first won him to my breast, lies Allessandro Massaroni, whom I made a brigand," said the courtesan, becoming beautiful again and magical in tone from the truthfulness of her speech. "Carlotti and I there interred him."

"The deuce. Who'd have dreamed that's where he vanished. But, a truce to that. Haste Sylvia, till we avoid our too good friends, and unearth the treasure you know of, alone. Come, come, we will roll in riches and luxury! Quick, I fear I hear them! Come, you strange woman. I love you—you ought to give me the treasure! Up, up! Satan seize you—they come! Will you rise! 'S death,——swallow me, but you shall come!"

Putting forth all his strength, he tried to lift the smiling woman, but she said bitterly :

"Too late, my dear Giulio!"

True, for a number of the bandits appeared and surrounded their captain, threateningly demanding a reason for his flight.

"You are cheating us—We own as much of the spoil as you—You promised us fair shares or we wouldn't have turned on Massaroni and left Carlotti after—We'll make your life answer for your false play—Kill him!—The treasure, the treasure, Giulio, or I'll knife you, by the ears of Saint Paul!" were some of their savage outcries.

"Sylvia, where is the hiding place?" cried others. "Your blood or the money!"

The woman started as if the barb had touched a bleeding wound.

She knew—who does not too soon find it out?—that she was no longer the very handsome woman she had once been, when she was the admired of every young man that knew her. That was in the days of her innocence, when even the hint of an evil thought would purple her round cheek, when she could look up at an image of the Madonna with eyes innocent as her own. No wonder that the fallen woman started.

But she regained her coolness by an effort and rejoined:

“In my abasement, I am still above you, for a grand and noble passion burns, if impurely, still in my heart. I have said I will not go with you, so leave me. Must I eternally repeat it?”

“But how can you drag out existence? Alone now in the cruel world, you have but me to lean on, I love you, do you hear? Come!”

Not a syllable did she make answer with. Giulio and the others fancied that she was selecting and, to make her decide, they drew nearer.

“Giulio hits it,” said one, “where will you go, if not with him or us? of course he loves you yet, you are bella donna still, the pride of the band, by San Pietro del Castello, I’ll swear to that!”

“Have done with this!” broke in others, the more ferocious.

Giulio, seeing their choler rise anew grasped the woman by the arm rudely.

“You have promised us the treasure. Yield it, or——”

“Or, what?” returned she, not even shrinking at the pain.

“I will make you sorry!”

“Strike me, dastard!” exclaimed the robber’s mistress, flaming up into the spirited courtesan of younger days.

“Worse than that! I’ll—I’ll hurl thee over into this abyss, only less deep than the gap to hell!”

“Coward! enough!”

So saying, she rose, shook him off as if he were a feather and his grasp a child’s, and stood up before all the brigands. She drew from her bosom a key which became the pole-star to their eyes.

“With this bit of bronze,” she began in measured tone. “I can make each of ye richer than a Russian noble, an English lord, a French duke, an Orsini or a Borgia! But on one condition!”

They moved their lips in avidity and in mute promise of accepting any proposition.

“I left Alessandro,” continued she, “because he shunned me and wounded my pride. Do you think I would bear more, scorn and insult, from this Giulio, who only reigned over me by help of my jealousy? He threatens to hurt, to kill me—he is only fit for woman-murder! Let him die, and the whole is yours! He tried to rob you of your shares—avenge yourselves!”

At first astounded by the unexpected outbreak, Giulio speedily recovered himself. He drew his knife and moved towards his denouncer.

“If you touch me, this beldame dies!” screamed he with ghastly face.

But the eager subjects of rapacity had had their impatience augmented by the fresh temptation which Sylvia had with the subtlety that her sex, learnt of the Serpent (so they say), glittered before them.

Giulio had barely spoken the words above, than he leaped in air, perforated by a score of balls. His blood actually spirted on Sylvia, who watched him, fiendishly rejoicing, as he writhed in the last gasp.

“He’s gone,” said one of the slayers, busy stripping the body. Now for your promise.”

Sylvia mounted up on the great flat crag that had been her seat, and from that pedestal, said exaltedly:

“The place whither I go is far away. Ye who hearken to me and ask me to

guide you into possession of a treasure beyond price, shall not be deceived in your hopes. But have you the courage to follow me?"

"Guide us, and you'll see," said all in one voice.

"The journey is long, but the way easy."

"Speak. Whither? To the world's end we'd go?

"So eager, eh?" continued she, but turning to hover over the awful gulf. "Come! I know of no treasure so priceless as that in yonder grave! I lead to it—Allessandro, my love—or—"

Before a hand could check her, the woman had leaped away out into the chasm. In the calm air she turned twice or thrice, but struck upon the slab many feet beneath which had been the aim of her terrific leap. She rolled off it, a mangled corpse. Its white was splashed with blood.

A curse from the lips of all the baffled men was the sound that followed her in the fall to meet her death rattle coming up!

* * * * *

The extreme prudence, over caution we may say, which the captain had generally exercised, was displayed in the trifling case we cite. One evening when he felt thirsty and yet dared not go into a public house, he sent to San Jose from the rancho an Indian to get him a bottle of brandy. Hardly had his messenger departed than a misgiving seized him, he jumped upon his horse, made a circuit, cut off the redskin and killed him on the road passing Coyote Creek.

Such were the unceasing tolls executed by the brigands throughout the state, such their violence, cruelty, rapacity, in all their acts, that the people could not stand it any longer.

It was no joke to hard working men in the towns or the mines when Jim or Joe, hearing the cry "Bill or Tom's found dead—murdered by those bloody devils of Joaquin's!" would throw down tools and sling one leg over a horse and gallop off with Dick and Harry to try to catch the assassins.

So the "hard-fists" and the "silk-stockings," few, however, began to cover the blank of a petition with signatures, for presentation to the Senate to obtain for Captain Harry Love authority to form a company of mounted riflemen, with whom he could scour the country and clear it of all the wretches who imperiled life and property of the law-abiding. A law was passed to this effect and signed by the Governor, May the 17th, 1853.

The Claude Duval of California had been running a three years' race.

On the twenty-eighth of the same month, by which you will see the Captain was active, Harry Love had his troop mustered in. The pay was each man a hundred and fifty dollars a month, the company to have three months existence, and no more than twenty to be its number. Though the salary was a mere flea-bite, each trooper had to furnish his horse, equipments, keep, and everything without any grounds for indemnity, a proof how truly they were volunteers. Love had picked out his score from comrades of his in the Texan and Mexican wars.

Their names were Colonel McLane, Major W. H. Harvey, Captain P. E. Conner, Captain W. Burns, Lieutenant George A. Mittall, Doctor D. S. Hollister, John Nuttall, C. F. Bloodworth, G. W. Evans, W. S. Henderson, C. W. McGowan, Robert Masters, Lafayette Black, the Hon. P. S. Herbert, E. B. Van Dorn, Piggott, Norton and Charles Young.

These set out from San Francisco, pretty well determined that they would not set eyes on the glorious bay and its Golden Gates unless they had had a tussle with the bandit and come off first best. As the intrepid little band rode through the towns and villages, they were cheered as they deserved to be, and, if they had desired drink, they might have floated in liquor, for Californians used to consider libations the only proper offering to a friend or one to whom Godspeed was wished. Some feared that the party was too small but they were such as did not know Harry Love, a man who had won his spurs in

charges with heroes of the Jack Hayes sort, and who had a mind superior in all points, from sagacity to fearlessness, to even the audacious robber against whom he was pitted.

The first thing Love set about doing, was to gain complete knowledge of the enemy's movements, his last halting places, his freshest tracks, so that he might fall upon him at the moment when a foe has least expected and in the place which would be most favorable to him.

On the third of June, the Pedro Sanchez who had been at San Francisco three months before, with Three-fingered Jack, was killed at Martinez near Columbia, by a Spaniard named Albino Teba. They had been wrangling about some money that they had stolen together, when Sanchez, enraged at his mate's obstinacy, had sprang upon him knife in hand. Senor Teba had jumped back, whipped out his revolver and bestowed four of its charges on his accomplice. Only one bullet hit, but that was enough to blot Pedro's name off the rolls of the band.

By a strange coincidence, on the very same day, Borilda had met his death at Stockton for assassination. He had been charged by his chief to kill a Mexican who had offended the latter, and in trying to carry out his orders, he had mortally wounded one Janes, who had been in the same room with the Mexican doomed by Joaquin. Borilda was proven guilty of the murder of three men and confessed his share in other more or less important crimes. A day or two before his execution, he had made himself master of a revolver on a table within his reach, and had tried to kill himself, but it had missed fire.

Joaquin Blanco, the third companion of Three-fingered Jack at San Francisco, was killed at Stockton in the ensuing year by a countryman of the name of Eugenie Cæsar.

In the evening of the ninth of June, four of the thieves, having forty horses in their charge, stopped at Andreas Harra's rancho, about twenty miles from San Luis Rey and, without any provocation whatever, fired on the former's family and wounded one of them. Then they pinioned three men in the house carried off all the gold and valuables on which they could lay their hands. At San Marco, they killed two young steers.

Next day, a troop left San Diego to pursue them, but the impossibility of tracking them after dark, forced them to throw up the chase then. Messages were sent to the different Indian tribes for them to head the robbers off, but the latter had had time to reach the mountains. A few days afterwards, eight horses were said to have been taken at Santa Margarita.

Pursued on all sides by relentless men at whose hands he, the offender, could expect no mercy, fearing a defeat which would have compromised all his hopes and designs so long hugged to his breast. Joaquin made up his mind to withdraw into concealment until he should have the reinforcements from Sonora.

In the commencement of July, Murieta took fifty head of horses from the rancho of Don Andreas Rico, at San Fernando, Los Angelos County. He pushed on to the San Francisco Rancho in the same county, where a ranchero told him bluntly that the cattle belonged to Pico and that he had better make restitution or he would get into trouble. Murietta actually restored all but seven of the stolen animals to the ranchero, charging him to take them back to the owner. Then he crossed in Santa Barbara County and crossed the highest sea-coast ground to Santa Inez, whence he could easily go down into the Sular Valley.

Acting upon secret intelligence giving him as certain the presence of the arch-robbers in this district, Captain Love moved hitherward with a dozen men, while the rest brightened their horses' shoes in other places. On crossing the Sular plains, he perceived at daybreak a patch of smoke over on the left. This common and unimportant sight to anybody else was of more weight to the

veteran ranger. He turned that way and cautiously proceeded towards the smoke. First, he only saw a few horses hidden five hundred yards or so from the fire, but, on drawing nearer yet and ascending a low butte, he discovered on another mound the Mexican chief of marauders in person and only six of his men.

One of the latter, in cooking, discovered the enemy; he gave the alarm, but only when the Americans were within a hundred yards of the encampment.

The ravagers rushed to horse, while on spurred the rangers, who made prisoners of two of the former in the onset.

Joaquin had scrambled on his steed and was fleeing with such rapidity, that he had a likelihood of escape, but Love, finding him nearly out of range, hastily put a bullet in his horse's side. The noble animal shuddered for a moment but, recovering the ardor in spite of its wound, bounded on again more impetuously than ever for at least fifty yards. But Harry Love knew where a bullet fired by him ought to strike, and he galloped on no wise despairing. Suddenly, sure enough, the fugitive chief saw blood spout out of his horse's nostrils and drip from its mouth, and down dropped the poor beast never to carry its own weight ever more.

The rider shook off the stirrups and ran on a-foot, but seeing the captain and one of his men thundering down on him, he turned and discharged the last two loads in his six shooter. At the same time a shower of missiles flew around him and he fell. He begged his captors to fire no more.

You've beat me—but only by surprise, he gasped, no matter! I'm satisfied—I've had enough revenge —”

Pale from loss of blood by several bullet holes, he pressed his left hand to his breast, leaned on his other arm for a short space and at last gave up the ghost.

Meanwhile Three-fingered Jack had been galloping away, pursued by two or three of the rangers. Though eleven bullets had found lodgement in his body, he rode for a mile and a half. But though the chasers did not have horses as fine as his, they were such skilled riders that they kept well up to him. At length finding he could not shake them off, he wheeled to fire, but only one shot out of his six went off. Five miss-fires told him all was against him. He would not surrender himself, nevertheless, and as he swore he would resist to the last, Captain Conner dashed up to him with a “spurt” of his horse, warded off a blow of the butt from the Mexican and gave him a shot in return which killed him instantly.

Fighting had been going on in the meantime at other points. When the rangers came to rally around Captain Love, they brought with them two prisoners. One of the bandits had been killed, name unknown. Two others had got off, but only one safe and sound, for his partner had died on the road of wounds.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PRISONERS' FATE.—JOAQUIN'S HEAD AND GARCIA'S HAND.—THE END.

After this bloody skirmish, Captain Love collected the spoils; the valuable horses which were restored to their real owners, six Mexican saddles more or less heavily silvered, as many revolvers, silver spurs, fine cloaks and a pair of holster pistols. As the successful rangers were returning to San Francisco, one of the captives broke his bonds somehow and flung himself into a pool of water, where he drowned himself. His companion was placed in the Mariposa County Jail, where he remained until the capturing party was dissolved, when he was taken to Martinez. There, he made a confession which proved the participation of a great number of his countrymen in the crimes he had committed; he was going to make revelations of more importance still in order to be state's

evidence, when he was prevented this. At midnight the prison doors were burst in by a mob of Mexicans, who took him out and hanged him. As Mexicans had rarely been so eager to anticipate justice by lynching, the belief is that these were active members of Joaquin's association and rancheros, who were desirous to cut short their repentant partner's avowals.

Love's men had only one object in view now: the obtaining of the rewards offered throughout the country to the captors as slayers of the notorious murderer and marauder. Most assuredly, they had earned the offers by the courage they had displayed, the dangers which they had braved, and the steadfastness with which they had pursued Murieta into the very midst of his band, and, to make evident reasons short, by their whole conduct.

The public of course had to be furnished with proofs of the facts.

Otherwise it would never have been believed that the famous Joaquin had been killed, despite all his worth. Captain Love would have had shameful suspicions attached to his reputation. So he had to do what in other cases, he was too brave to have dreamt of, that is give the order for Murieta's head to be cut off and carried to the nearest town, a hundred and fifty miles off, to be preserved in spirits.

On the fourteenth of August, Black and Nuttal reached San Francisco from Stockton, bearing the head of the famous highwayman, whose countless crimes had given him an unparalleled name in the annals of wrong-doing.

The astonishing rapidity of his actions, the number of his accomplices, the extent of his operations over a region excessively vast, had united to set his name up simultaneously in opposite quarters so often that some people actually deemed him a myth, to whom was erroneously attributed all the guilt of all the malefactors in the land. Even after his death, rumor would have it that he was still in the southern counties, continuing his system of daily murders and pilaging as in the past the rancheros and mining camps.

But Black and Nuttal, besides the *caput mortuum*, brought with them numerous certificates from persons who had been acquainted with Joaquin; it was therefore impossible to doubt the identity and not credit the assertions of Captain Love and his gallant comrades.

The head was on exhibition in order to let the people see and judge for themselves. Thus ran the placard:

JOAQUIN'S HEAD can be seen at "King's."
corner of Halleck and Sansome Streets, opposite the American Theatre.

ADMISSION**ONE DOLLAR.**

Among the numerous guarantees and certificates were the following:

STATE OF CALIFORNIA, (*United States*), County of San Francisco. Ignatio Lisarrago, of Sonora, after being duly sworn, declares that he has seen the so-called head of Joaquin, now in the hands of Messers Nuttal and Black, lieutenants of Captain Love's independent company, which head is exhibited on the premises of John King, Sansome Street, and that the deponent knew well Joaquin Murieta, and swears that the aforesaid head is really and truly that of the Murieta afore-mentioned.

Signed: IGNATIO LISARRAGO.

"Sworn before me, this 17th August, A. D., 1853.

"CHARLES D. CARTER, *Notary Public.*

STATE OF CALIFORNIA (U. S.), San Joaquin County.

This day, the eleventh of the month of August of the present year 1853, appeared before me, A. C. Baine, criminal judge of the said county, in person the Reverend Dominic Blaive, who declared under oath, conformably to law, that he had known for two years, Joaquin Murieta the famous bandit; and further that he (the deponent aforesaid) has seen the head which is at present in the possession of Captain Conner, one of Captain Harry Love's lieutenants of

his independent force, and that he believes that the said head is that of Joaquin himself, known to him as declared above.

"Signed: DOMINIC BLAIVE.

"Certified and signed by me, on date of these presents:

"A. C. BAINE, Judge."

This happened (let us say to give another meed to the man of all deserving it, though we go off our road), under the French Consulates, as the antique Romans say of Monsieur Dillon, one of the most estimable of gentlemen, whose appointment to his troubrous position was an honor to his country, as to that of his residence, and almost a blessing to the Queen City of the Pacific. Nor should we omit on this occasion to speak in commendation of M. Morenheit, sometime French Consul at Monterey, who was ever vigilant in aiding the authorities. Mons. M. was a true type of the French gentleman.

As we were saying, everybody and his wife and child, flocked to stare at the head of the highwayman, not an unhandsome one, by any means. We wonder, though, that the lip did not curl with scorn and the eyes flash fire at the remarks which some Yankee phrenologists passed on it, in our hearing. It was carried around into different parts of the state, along with the three-fingered hand of Garcia, which terrified certain superstitious people by its nails having grown at least an inch since it had been severed from the wrist.

After a formal verification, Colonel John Bigler, governor of the state, had paid over to Captain Harry Love the sum of a thousand dollars which he had personally promised to the captor of the bandit dead or alive. A little later May the 15th, 1854, the Senate, considering firstly that the ridding the land of such a scourge had not been sufficiently rewarded, decreed that an additional sum of five thousand dollars should be allowed.

Although the death of their leader was an irreparable loss to his followers and even compelled them to disband, they broke up into little parties and continued a desultory skirmishing which sometimes made people fancy that the highwayman's spirit was up in arms again.

* * * * *

Towards the end of '54, the head of Murieta was sold by Deputy Sheriff Harrison, in virtue of a seizure for debt against the owner of the relic. While the bidding was at its height, a voice, either Irish or a good imitation, and earnest or well-feigned, cried out apparently indignantly :

"An' is it sillin' the head of your fellow-creature, ye are! The saints betime us, ye'll niver have anythin' but bad cess all your life!"

The bidding had run up to three-and-sixty dollars. Down fell the hammer, and that's the price the head went for. Here comes the singular part. Not long afterwards, Harrison committed suicide. The buyer, a gunsmith, known as "Natchez," was accidentally killed in showing a loaded pistol to a customer.

* * * * *

Such is the story of the most famous bandit that the world ancient or modern ever had its records stained with. In tracing it through authentic sources, documents and the newspapers which pioneered the literary prides of the present days of Altas, Golden Ages, Mercuries, etc., etc., perhaps we have colored the facts a little vividly, but we have not inserted an account of one homicide which was not true. And in rounding off our pages relative to the dark days of the "Golden Land," let us express our wish that she may increase in all freshness and beauty, and riches, and that she will continue evermore on her peaceful path, the frown replaced by a smile of happiness, her robes no more trailed in blood and earth, but radiant with purest gold and purest silver, brighter than the intelligence of her sons, pure as her daughters' hearts!

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